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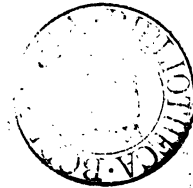
*ECHOES OF SPOKEN WORDS.*



# ECHOES OF SPOKEN WORDS.

BY

S. A. TIPPLE.



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PREFACE  
TO PUBLISHED EDITION.

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THESE sermons, originally printed for private circulation, are now given to the public, in reluctant surrender to the opinions and wishes of many friends; yet not without some faint hope on the part of the writer that a few here and there, beyond the small circle he has hitherto addressed, may find in them words of help.

NORWOOD, *Jan.* 1877.





## PREFACE.

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THESE Sermons, preached in the ordinary course of pulpit ministration, have been printed, simply to gratify a persistent wish—a wish long expressed, and of late with increasing urgency, not only by many who are still content to listen to me on Sundays, but by many others also, now scattered abroad, who in former times have sat and heard among us, and the memory of whose once-familiar faces is dear to me.

Pressed again and again, for some years past, to give such friends, in a permanent form, a few of my weekly utterances, until, to reiterate refusal became wearisome, and seemed almost unamiable; I at length consented, although with extreme reluctance, to carry out their desire, and now offer them this small volume, produced at a cost of conflict with inclination, and toil with obscure notes, which is hardly likely to be appreciated, I suspect, in correspondence with my own sense and estimate of it.

### *Preface.*

The reluctance felt by me has been owing chiefly to three considerations; the first of which is,—that discourses meant and made for oral delivery are not, as a rule, adapted for reading. As Ruskin somewhere says: "A book is, essentially, not a talked thing, but a written thing;" and these of mine *are* talked things, and therefore, to some extent, unsuitable for a book. That which, as a spoken word, may be not only allowable but most fit and forcible; as a written word might be entirely the reverse.

Then, again, I considered that the sermon *preached* cannot possibly be reproduced on paper; the living presence—the voice, the tones, the gestures of the speaker—being necessarily absent; to say nothing of the atmosphere of the place, "where prayer is wont to be made," the associations and influences of the hour, or that reflection, and consequent intensifying of feeling, which the congregation involves. All this is wanting in the discourse *printed*, to its great impairment and disadvantage, leaving it always so much weaker than when *spoken*, sometimes, indeed, scarcely recognisable for the same. Hence the reading at home of what we have heard in the church—and perhaps were then kindled and impressed by—must need be, almost invariably, more or less disappointing.

The third consideration was this, that while my

### *Preface.*

sermons might have been worth preaching, they were not worth printing; certainly not worth printing *because* they had been worth preaching; for talk may be good enough, and, for the moment, important and useful enough, and yet have no claim to be "embalmed and treasured up" in a book. It has served a purpose probably, may have met a want, and done a work at the time, was interesting, edifying, quickening; but it does not follow at all that any sufficient end would be answered in preserving it.

Thus much in explanation of my unwillingness to comply with the request of those to whom it is my privilege and happiness to minister, in the doctrine of Christ our Lord. Should, however, the compliance to which at last they have won me result in any further contribution, on my part, to the help or refreshing of their higher life, I shall be content to believe that this venture into print has not been altogether mistaken or unwise.

Let me only add, in conclusion, that the sermons selected, have been taken from what may be broadly termed, three groups; and mainly upon the principle of choosing from these, the discourses that were capable of being reproduced, *most nearly* as they were delivered.

S. A. TIPPLE.

*Cintra Park, Upper Norwood,  
Sept. 28th, 1876.*





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## CHRIST COMFORTING HIMSELF.

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JOHN x. 17, 18.

"Therefore doth my Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father."

**T**HESE words—although spoken, it would seem, to an audience—read like a soliloquy. Jesus Christ, we may say, is heard here, comforting Himself—comforting Himself with the reflection that someone loves Him, and with the sense of His power. The people facing Him—many of them at least—had listened with sneers and anger, to His repeated asseverations of the intimate union that existed between Himself and God, of the unique filial relation which He bore to the Almighty, and they were already secretly meditating a step that would suffice, in their opinion, to expose the emptiness of such asseverations. "He is destined to fall into our hands," they thought; "it will come in time; we shall be able presently to arrest, and put Him out of the way, and *that* will shatter at once His presumptuous claims; *that* will evince to all, how far He was from being Jehovah's Son." Possibly He read

the thought in their eyes as they stood before Him, scornful and scowling (for the eyes do report often the hidden matters of the breast), and He met, and answered it calmly, with the inward consciousness that the event which His enemies designed to be the means of disproving His asserted relationship to the Father, involved the culmination of a voluntary self-sacrifice on His part, which rendered Him the special object of the Father's approbation and affection; that while they would be supposing themselves to have succeeded in manifesting Him an outcast, disowned and forsaken of Heaven, He would be winning and enjoying its strong embrace.

Such is frequently the blindness and defeat of bad men, when in their passion they think to work mischief for the good; they fancy that they are accomplishing their end; and they *may* pain them, wound them, plunge them even in outward ruin or shame; yet, instead of being really harmed, they are actually blest; through the spirit that is in them, the intent and attempt to injure, becomes the occasion of some higher benefit. It is poor business, trying to hurt a saint. You can never be certain, whatever grief and distress you may manage to inflict upon him,—you can never be certain, that your hardest blows will not ensure him *more abundant* consolation; that in stripping him *savagely*, you will not be instrumental in conducing to his enrichment.

But what I desire us to perceive is this, that Christ is comforting Himself here, amidst

surrounding estrangement and hostility, with the reflection that *someone loves Him*; that there is One, at all events, who smiles upon and sympathises with Him thoroughly; One by whom His present course and mission are intensely appreciated and delighted in. We find Him doing this once and again: "My Father honoureth Me;" "My Father beareth witness of Me;" "I am not alone, the Father is with Me." So, would He pause at moments, to seek and receive soothing, inspiration and support, in the assurance that He was loved. He could not get on without it, any more than we can, least of all, perhaps, the richest, finest natures among us. *Some* persons are constantly craving and crying out for affection, and devote themselves to the task of choosing their utterances, and framing their conduct, with the view of gaining and keeping as much of it as possible; they scheme and fret for you to fondle them, and are mortified and unhappy if you do not. *That* is small and weak, and *that* was not Christ; but to be loved was sweet to Him, and the thought that He was loved, contributed to sustain and animate Him in His work. Like ourselves, it helped Him to feel, while misunderstood and unvalued, while living daily in the midst of contempt and enmity,—like ourselves, it helped Him to feel, "One above, whom I supremely care for and reverence, who is to Me the greatest and best,—He is pleased with what I am doing; He is filled with interest and sympathy toward Me; His heart is with Me, and embraces Me in My enterprise."

There was a charm for Him, and a stimulus to endurance, in the sense of being loved. Brethren, let us give all the love we can, and give it as widely as we can, for what *heat* is in nature that *love* is in the human realm. It tends to quicken and expand and beautify those upon whom it lights; it assists men to be better and stronger and more gracious than they would otherwise be. Under its influence, souls are enabled to bud and blossom more freely; and let none of us be ashamed of *needing* it, and leaning on it for succour. Let none of us determine bitterly, in seasons of desertion and disappointment, to be above wanting it, or indulge the notion that to be so, is exalted and grand. It is not; it is human, it is manly, to be comforted with love.

But the Lord Jesus comforts Himself, also, you see, with His *felt possession of power*. "I have power," He says, "power to lay down my life, and power to take it again." His adversaries were contemplating beating Him; they regarded Him as one who was about to become their victim. In His easy fall at length, beneath their plot and device against Him, He would appear to be a poor feeble creature, captured and conquered; but, "Ah, no," He muses, "they are mistaken; they do not understand. My immolation will be the sign and result, not of weakness, but of strength, even the strength of a spirit capable of foregoing and relinquishing, capable of surrendering to be emptied, and humiliated, for lofty ends. Instead of being *dragged* helplessly, as they imagine, I am *marching* in

might to die. There is a glory and a majesty in My succumbing—a glory and majesty of power, which they discern not.”

Now, we need not start at, or shrink from the suggestion, that the Redeemer sought and found some solace, some sustenance, in this consciousness of His superiority to that which He *looked*, to the aspect which He presented, as the Scribes and Pharisees prevailed against Him ; in the consciousness that while he seemed, and was deemed, weak, He was really, sublimely strong. It is quite natural and legitimate, when we are being estimated falsely in relation to capacity, when circumstances, misleading circumstances, operate to dwarf us considerably in the eyes of others below our true stature, or when vulgar souls, blind fools, presume to disdain us, because we lack certain outward accessories, certain conventional distinctions and adornments; it is quite natural and legitimate at such periods, to contemplate with satisfaction our unrecognised worth and quality, and to retire upon it for consolation; to *feel* the excellence or the gift in us that is not perceived. We may *need* to do this occasionally, in encountering depreciation and disparagement, in the presence of supercilious and scornful glances, in order to preserve our self-possession, and to keep ourselves from fainting. It was the confession of some thinker and scholar, I forget whom,—but of some finely strung, delicately constituted thinker and scholar, whose person was mean, and his exterior utterly unfashionable, that he was often obliged, on first entering an assembly

of stylish shallow heads, to whom he was unknown, to support himself, under their curious and half-contemptuous looks, by remembering who he was, how immensely the superior in intellectual wealth and calibre, of all those who surrounded him. You may be thankful if you are able sometimes, to turn for comfort, from the opinions that are held of you, and the talk that is going on about you, to the thought of what you know yourself to be ; if you are able to find rest and refreshment in that. There are men who never can ; their reputation is the best thing they have belonging to them ; they are generally smaller and meaner than the social estimate of them, and nothing are they so ready to avoid, nothing, in the midst of your *commendations* of them, would they less willingly seek, than a private interview with themselves.

But now observe, *first*, what it was in Christ which called forth the Father's love ; and, *secondly*, what the power was which He possessed, and the secret of it.

God loved Him, He states, because He lay down His life in order that He might take it again ; not, mark, *simply* because He surrendered it, but because of the *motive* that actuated Him—the object He had in view, in making the surrender. The beauty and grace of an act of sacrifice lies, not in the act itself, but in the animating spirit and purpose. So much is said now-a-days in eulogy of self-sacrifice, that we are rather apt to forget this—to forget that whether it be praiseworthy at all, depends upon the impulse that

moves ; the end that is sought by it. There is no necessary virtue or rightness in denying yourself,—in choosing to be bruised, or deprived,—in foregoing something that you could justly have claimed,—or in relinquishing something that you would like to have kept ; it may be anything but virtuous and right. Sacrifices are made often, out of mere weakness ; nothing of noble aim or generous enthusiasm inspires them : the man punishes and afflicts himself—submits to be miserable, does with profound resignation, what is disagreeable or painful to him, from a weak regard for the usages of the little world in which he revolves, and because it is expected of him. Often, they are scarcely more than forms of self-indulgence—sacrifices offered to personal pride or vanity—to the craving after the sensational, or the desire to enjoy the sense and distinction of being a martyr ; sometimes the sacrifice is sullenness and petulance, with a spice of malignity in it. A member of the family is put out, and seeks to punish others, and hopes to render them uncomfortable, by crucifying himself openly before them. You may practice self-denial, selfishly, meanly, pettishly, maliciously, from indolence or cowardice, in quite another than a divine spirit, for unworthy and even wicked ends ; and times there are when the gracious, gentle giving up, and giving way to people, which is extolled and admired as, “ So Christian ! ” carries with it a disregard, an infirm and culpable disregard, of the right and the highest good, of the claims of other people, and

even of what might be wisest and best for the people themselves ; for it may not be the emollient of a tender yielding to them, which their moral interests most demand, but *rather* the blister of a sharp withstanding ; you may be doing really the unkindest and most mischievous thing that can be done, in sacrificing to their wishes ; yet, in your anxiety to please or make peace, you neglect to consider it.

It was not the mere fact that Christ poured Himself out to death, which drew forth the Father's love, but the motive and aim of the self-emptying : " Because I lay down My life," He says, "*in order* that I might take it again." This explanation, however, of His motive and aim is at first sight rather disappointing ; it reveals nothing particularly worthy of admiration, nothing which strikes us as in any degree beautiful or noble. " What was there," we ask, " to charm and win the heart of God, in His *surrendering* just for the purpose of *recovering* ?" But was there not a meaning in His words, larger and deeper than appears ? I think there was ; and some other utterances of His, in connection with some utterances of His apostles, seem to me to indicate it. You remember how He said on one occasion, in the prospect of the Cross, " Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." And again to the disciples, when they were grieving at the thought of losing Him, " Although the world seeth Me no more, ye will

see Me, for I shall live, and ye shall live also." And then you remember such passages in the Epistles as these: "He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens that He might fill all things;" "We are quickened together with Christ, and are raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places;" "Who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep we should live together with Him."

Now, is there not a new light thrown for us upon the words, "I lay down My life, that I might take it again"? Do we not see and feel what He must have meant—that He was contemplating, as the end and object of His self-sacrifice, not the mere recovery of Himself, but a recovery of Himself that should constitute Him thenceforth a great source and fountain of good, that should draw after Him in His wake an innumerable multitude of human souls, hitherto strangers to the grace and glory of the true life, and comprehend them with Him in the blessedness of sons? Yes, that was His grand idea—the idea for which the Father loved Him—to die out that He might revive, to be lost that He might be restored, as "the first-born of many brethren;" no longer separate and solitary in His filial standing, but influential to gather others into it; having His beautiful filial life no longer in Himself alone, but widely diffused and spread abroad, a propagating force, and a distributed enjoyment. This is noble sacrificing, to deny oneself with a view to acquiring more capacity for service, or to the

effecting of some redemption, some enlargement, some change for the sweeter and the better in lives around us.

And now, *secondly*, concerning the power of which Christ was conscious, and the secret of it. When He says, "I have power to lay down my life," I understand Him to mean—not according to a common and superficial explanation, that He had a right to elect to die, as we have not—the right to deliver Himself voluntarily for destruction into the hands of His enemies, but something deeper than that, viz. that He felt Himself *able* to make the sacrifice required of Him; that, great, and severe, and painful as it was, He did not shrink from it, did not need to be dragged or urged to it, but was able to make it freely, cheerfully, unhesitatingly; recognising that it was the right thing to do, the true thing to do, and that only thus could He become the source and fountain of blessing which He desired to become, He had the assurance within Him that He *could* do it; that He was *capable* of taking up and bearing this terrible cross. How one envies Him! It is not always, when we *see* clearly what is demanded of us, and what ought to be done by us,—it is not always, that we can *feel* like that. Ah! sometimes, we see clearly enough the obligation, the beauty, the loveliness of a certain course, and we would like well enough to follow it; we should admire and applaud immensely, anyone who did, but we feel that *we* cannot; the suffering would be too sharp, the cost too heavy. Oh!

what happiness there is in this sense of power,—of power to respond at once, to the call of a difficult, trying, arduous duty ; to accept at once, an invitation from Heaven to be divinely self-sacrificing ; and Christ had it. “Yes,” He said, looking straight at the awful but fruitful endurance, that was offered Him, “yes, I *can* lay down My life that I *may* take it again ;” and while thus able to lay it down, “I have power,” He adds, “to take it again ;” in which I read, just the expression of His inward faith and conviction that the sacrifice would not be in vain ; that it would surely issue in what He sought and hoped to accomplish by it ; that through it He would infallibly be strong for salvation and blessing ; would infallibly rise and expand into the life of beneficent operation which He craved. He was certain, not only that He could bear the cross set before Him, but that He should reap to the full the anticipated fruit of it. “I feel,” was His happy confidence, “I feel that I am able to lay down My life, and I feel that in laying it down, I shall be able to take it again.” What on earth more blessed than this ?—an undoubting assurance of power to do what you perceive to be the wholly true ; and the entirely noble thing to do, although involving unspeakable self-crucifixion and self-denial ; and an undoubting assurance of reaching the distant goal that fires and attracts you—of gaining the object that lies nearest to your heart ? And what was the secret of it all, in the case of Christ ? He tells us, you observe, in the words, “This commandment have

I received of My Father :” as though He had said, “ My sense of the Father, and of the Father’s will and purpose,—*that* is the explanation of My strength—My strength to endure, and to believe in the results of enduring ; *that* is what arms and supports Me ; *that* is what enables Me to work and suffer, to hope and look forward as I do, to be the man of power that I am ; it is in the consciousness of Him, and of His will and purpose.”

Now, there are those, you know, to whom the Father is *not* visible nor audible, and who affirm that we can be strong, and live bravely and grandly, without Him ; who profess to be able to do so themselves ; but whatever they may be, and attain to—and there is much that they are, and do attain to, that is beautiful and good—none of them, it seems to me, are at all comparable to Christ, certainly not in the power of loving self-sacrifice, or in assured vision of a new heaven and earth wherein shall dwell righteousness ; none of them would I choose for my ideal, and make it my ambition to endeavour to resemble, in preference to Him ; none come up to Him ; and when He attributes what He was, and what He could do,—His wonderful capability of denying Himself for generous and splendid ends, and of seeing these ends afar off and being persuaded of them ; —when He attributes it to His sense of the Father, and the Father’s will and purpose, I would rather *trust*, and *try* His secret ; I would rather drink with Him, of the stream by which He was nourished ; I would rather stay and cultivate with

Him, the thought and perception of the Father—*would not you ?*

“I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again ;” “This commandment have I received of my Father.” As though He had said,—What God really calls one to do, one is certain to have strength to accomplish ; and equally certain is it that the thing so inspired and so performed, will yield in time its due fruit. You may attempt some things, and break down in them miserably ; may carry out some things with bright expectations of happy result, only to find your expectations disappointed ; but whatever God really calls you to do, you will be able to do, and it will never prove barren. Men may tell you perhaps, with an air of pity, that you are foolish to venture upon such a cross—to rush into such a sacrifice for conscience or truth’s sake ; that it will be too much for you—that you will be sure to fail under it, and involve yourself in needless humiliation and shame ; while adding, with an air of supreme conviction, that it will do no good—that you are only crucifying yourself in vain—that the cause of human progress is not likely to be advanced by it a bit—that after a time you will die and pass away, and nothing will have been effected by the contribution of your self-abnegating devotion to what you believed was right or true ; but you may reply to them, says Christ, in words like Mine : “I shall have power to lay down my life, and I shall have power to take it again ; for this commandment have I received of the Father.”





## THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST TO BE A SHEPHERD.

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HEBREWS xiii. 20.

“ Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.”



OUR Lord Jesus !” Not *alone* a Power to save, but a Lesson to teach ; not only the Redeemer of men, but the illustration and the type of man. Let us start with an understanding and remembrance of that ; that His career, for example, embodies a world of truth—eminently practical truth—concerning us, and may be made the standard and the reference for everything relating to us ; that in His course and history are to be found, principles for our guidance, law and light for our lives, disclosures about ourselves ; that from it we may learn, how to measure and estimate, what to aim at and expect, and may derive true ideas with regard to worth, greatness, dignity, and the secret of acquiring these.

Coming with such an understanding and remembrance, to the passage just read, it will yield us

20 *Exaltation of Christ to be a Shepherd.*

instructions and suggestions of a kind that might otherwise be missed. The subject, you will observe, is the exaltation of Christ ; His being "brought again"—or rather, brought up—from the dead ; language which, on the lips of the New Testament apostles, comprehends generally much more than the mere re-animation of His crucified body. By the raised Saviour, they intended the Saviour who had risen from the grave to the throne of the universe ; the Saviour who, having descended to "the lower parts of the earth," had ascended from thence far above all heavens. His "resurrection" was the favourite term with them for the whole process of His glorification ; His emergence out of sublunary conditions into supernal ; a process beginning with the revivification of the corpse that lay in Joseph's sepulchre, and terminating with His establishment at "the right hand of the Majesty on high." And with reference to this exaltation of His, the text represents that it constituted Him "the great Shepherd of the sheep," and that it was owing to "the blood of the everlasting covenant:" the teaching of which two points, for ourselves, let me endeavour to elucidate and apply.

*First*, then, our Lord Jesus in being "brought up from the dead" to the height of celestial glory and power, became "the great Shepherd of the sheep." *That* was the product, the value, the main distinction of His elevated state ; that was its significance, and the purpose which it fulfilled—to enable Him to be supreme helper and com-

forter to the many who needed, to enable Him to bear their burdens, and adequately supply their needs. He was crowned grandly; to communicate graciously; was surpassingly invested, that He might succouringly influence. It was all done; His physical organism restored and etherealised; the possession of heavenly might and majesty bestowed upon Him; "a name given Him above every name,"—to make Him a ministering spirit to the weak.

Now what is it which such a fact in the story of the Son of Man conveys to us and settles for us? What, but that the loftiest positions and the noblest attainments—positions and attainments to be most coveted as the finest—are those which render us capable of becoming most serviceable in the interests of others, of accomplishing most for the blessing and benefit of others. If the exaltation of the Son of Man to inherit sublimest station and to wield sublimest powers, *meant* His exaltation to be a *Shepherd*, it must be so. Then gifts and talents are brilliant, in proportion as they are sweetly useful; situation and place, splendid, in proportion as they tend to beneficent use. There are many so-called high positions and high attainments, the effect of which is chiefly to insulate their owners from their fellows, in solitary eminence; to cause them to be stared at, wondered at, and admired from a distance. The *truly* high position or high attainment, is that which enables us to *minister* richly to our fellows, to shield them, guide them, relieve them, and be

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## 22 *Exaltation of Christ to be a Shepherd.*

shepherdly toward them. The more there is in your position or attainment, of real helpfulness to other people—to throbbing human souls and struggling human lives, around and below you—the higher it is. Our ambition should be, to court and cultivate most, the situations and the talents that will make us most helpful; that will give us largest scope or power for service. We should feel it a finer thing, to acquire the art of healing wounds, than the art of calculating eclipses; a finer thing, to occupy a post of toil in the cause of the ignorant and the suffering, than a post of honour and authority in a palace; that of the two, it is grander, to learn how “to bind up the broken-hearted,” or to “speak a word in season to him that is weary,” than to learn how to investigate the secrets of nature, or converse in five languages.

And the exaltation of Christ to be “the great Shepherd of the sheep,” conveys to us and settles for us something further, *namely*, that the proudest possession a man can have, is the possession of shepherdly capacity. This is presented in the text, as the summit and crown of our Lord’s development, the topmost height to which He rose,—that He was able thenceforth to take charge of others, to care for and soothe them, to succour and manage for them as no one else could; that He was able thenceforth to fold securely, and to pasture perfectly, the flock of God. See Him in His ultimate and unapproachable elevation—*the Shepherd*—“the great Shepherd of the sheep.” Then the greatness of a man is to be measured,—*not* by the amount of

his wealth, his social rank, the profundity and variety of his learning, the extent of his fame, or the might of his influence,—but by the measure of his capacity for making himself useful to men. Nothing is so divine as a gift for usefulness, a gift for understanding, feeling, entering into the needs of those about us, and flowing forth, amply and aptly, to meet them.

I say “amply and aptly,” for some persons assume to act the shepherd toward the poor and the miserable, who have little or no shepherdly power; they are very busy and earnest, but they are deficient in the requisite delicate perception and sensibility, in the requisite skill and tenderness of touch; they cannot appreciate quickly, peculiar and varying circumstances, cannot penetrate and seize sympathetically, the secret heart of a matter; they apply themselves blindly, blunderingly, and only tease and bore, only ruffle and exasperate, instead of help. It is a grievous thing, and hard to be borne, to be smothered with the attentions of a would-be shepherd, who is destitute of the shepherdly genius; but to have something of a true shepherd’s eye and hand, is the finest of possessions; and the more we are able, not only to respond fluently and sagaciously, in the presence of human want and suffering, but to render our knowledge, our acquisitions, and accomplishments, *ministerial*—*ministerial* to some of the deeper needs of men—the greater we are, the greater, whether as orators, artists, or scholars. The greatest orator is he whose eloquence is

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mightiest in stirring to high aims and endeavours, in aiding the weak to be strong, the grovelling to aspire, the despairing to hope and strive. The greatest artist is he whose pictures are most calculated to refine and purify; to teach noble lessons and produce ennobling impressions; in which there is most power to evoke some better feeling in those who gaze, or to give them some fresh healing, elevating, strengthening inspiration. The greatest scholar is he whose learning is most fruitful in gracious service to men. The exaltation of Christ preaches to us to believe in the pre-eminence of ministry; to make the acquisition of the art of helping our supreme ambition. Let us seek to be great with Him, who ascended on high to be a Shepherd, "the Shepherd of the sheep."

But now for the *second* point in the text, which is, that He was raised up and exalted "through the blood of the everlasting covenant."

His blood, you see, according to the Apostle, was for Himself no less than for us, was shed, not only for our saving, but for His rising; if we are affected by it, so also was He; to it He owed His lofty and magnificent rapture—His rapture, far above all heavens—to be a great Shepherd. Had he not first descended, He could never have ascended as He did. His glorious resurrection was the outcome of His cross of self-sacrifice, and was not to be attained without it. All the splendour and power into which He rose after death, were reached and won by Him through His blood. This is the apostolic doctrine concerning

Him; that the secret of His wonderful enlargement lay in His previous wonderful enduring; that the secret of His being what He is now—so high and lifted up, so transcendently enthroned and capable—lay in the fact of what He had been, so straitened and struggling; that the secret of His unrivalled fulness of strength and ability, lay in His unrivalled self-emptying. “The God of peace brought Him up from the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant.”

And what does this say to us, my brethren? Many things. How solemnly and forcibly it reminds us, for instance, that there is no royal road to any true acquisition or success. That if we would *have*, we must *be*. That if we would *inherit*, we must *do*. That it is impossible to *gain* a height except by *climbing*. We need often to be reminded of this, especially in our youth; when floating upon the springtide of imagination and romance, we are apt to content ourselves with dreaming splendid dreams of future achievement or position; when swept by delicious languors, we are apt to fret at the drudgery of toiling for the radiant vision, and to trust that time, and chance, and good fortune, may somehow realise it for us in the end; or, when wrapped in golden mists of conceit—those golden mists that rise and vanish with the morning—we are apt to fancy that we have wings and can fly; that for us, plodding and pains are needless. We are *all* prone, indeed, to give way sometimes to the delusion of thinking to obtain, without earning; to overtake without

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pursuing, or to hasten to the goal by a shorter and smoother path than the road; and the Christ in heaven, with His cross beneath Him, seems revealed to show us that it may not, cannot be; that glory demands suffering, and triumph involves blood, by a constant and immutable law. There are semblances and appearances, gaudy counterfeits, showy pretences, with which men often content themselves, because these can be reached more quickly and less laboriously; but the true success, the real power, in any direction, must always be paid for with sweat of patient toil. And if ever we are tempted to be satisfied, with aught lower than the true and the real, for the sake of rapidity and ease, let us remember Him whom such temptation failed to allure from the slow, sharp way of the cross, who turned His back upon the offer of something inferior and superficial, that might be had presently without pain, to persevere in waiting and bleeding, for that which should be solid and divine. Let us remember, too, when inclined to murmur at the labour which it costs to obtain the true success, the real power, that He had to endure in the same way to obtain His kingdom, and did not grumble or complain.

Then see, again, the assurance which we have in Christ's exaltation through His blood, of the vital connection between the present life, and the life beyond the grave; that the latter is being shaped and determined by the former, and will be the issue and effect of it; that we are passing on,

not to escape or lose in death, what has preceded it—the character that has been formed, the spirit that has been cherished, the course that has been followed—but to taste the innermost quality, to reap the ripe harvest of these;—are passing on, not to get rid of ourselves in death, but to receive in death, the flower and fruit of ourselves; to meet and be embraced by the figure, which earthly habits and deeds have been secretly building.

Says the Lord Jesus, from His shepherdly throne behind the veil, “Behold in Me the pledge, that *here* you shall find, the full product and outcome of your lives—the precipitated grace or ugliness, the precipitated weakness or strength, the precipitated gold or clay, or mixed gold and clay, of all that you have been; that *here* you shall find the cup of sweetness, or the sour draught, which your cross or your self-indulgence has been distilling; My exaltation is the effluence *here* of My blood; had I been less faithful in enduring, I could not have sat so high in ruling as now; had I consecrated Myself less thoroughly, I could not have been so great a Shepherd as I am.” Yes, my friends, like Him, we shall awake in death, with the form and amid the scenery, which our present daily doings and becomings are sowing; to us, like Him, the future will bring, the robes we are weaving, and the wine we are growing beneath these skies—whether they be robes of gloom or glory, whether it be wine of wild or goodly grapes.

And, once more, in the bringing up of Christ

through His blood, have we not the truth exemplified, that shepherdly power comes only through self-foregoing and self-giving. It was His self-tradition and self-emptying, even to the cross of sacrifice, that raised Him on high to be "the great Shepherd of the sheep," and nothing else would have sufficed to effect it. Had He not lost Himself, and the thought and love of self, in overflowing enthusiasm for the Father and man—an enthusiasm that impelled Him to dare all suffering, and to pour out His soul to death—He could never have risen and ascended thus. It was by such perfecting, that He became "the merciful and faithful High-priest," and "the Author of eternal salvation;" and it is to such perfecting that we must approximate, if we would learn to be rich in ministry and mighty in service. There is a vast amount of plausible and promising effort—effort philanthropic and evangelistic—that is comparatively wasted, or considerably marred and weakened, just because so much self-cleaving, and self-consciousness, accompanies it. The workers need to forget themselves more, before their work can be truly effective. Here are two men—two speakers; one is eloquent exceedingly, and you admire him; you sit and listen to his glowing periods, with bated breath, with a kind of fearful delight; still he does not touch your deepest soul, does not make you feel, and respond mightily, to the truths he enunciates. The other,—although not half so eloquent,—does. You do not admire him particularly; you have heard many a better

orator than he, yet somehow, he moves and persuades you strangely ; somehow, the truth upon his lips lays hold of, penetrates, possesses you. The secret of the difference may be, that while in the one case, *self* is present and pervasive ; in the other, self has passed into the subject—has melted away in a consuming heat of earnestness. Some people have an ambition to be accounted shepherds, and fancy they are ; but they are not, and cannot be, because they are too much burdened with themselves—are incapable of relinquishing themselves ; hence *they* are never real shepherds, who contemplate benefiting themselves by means of benefiting you ; who come to you to do you good, to comfort or succour you, with the idea of finding in the exercise, discipline and education for themselves. The Lord Jesus was able to save others, because He did not come to save Himself ; because “Himself” was swallowed up and sacrificed in His concern for them. The true shepherd giveth *himself* for the sheep. Only when self goes down beneath, and is overswept by a great tide of love,—only then is it, that we become powerful to serve and bless. So long as a thorough self-tradition and self-forgetting is wanting in our work, whatever it may be, there is a weakness in it ; nay, more, there is a stain, a taint upon it, that tends to corruption and decay. No work is vital, and lasts ; no work *keeps*, that is done with a self-remembering, self-considering mind. It may be popular and admired ; it may temporarily succeed, but it will not live ; the self-consciousness and

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self-regard with which it is wrought, sooner or later rots and kills it. *The giving up of self*; *this* is "the blood of the everlasting covenant," which makes the Christ an enduring and undying power to save; *this* is "the blood of the everlasting covenant," eternally binding on all, who aspire to be in their degree shepherds of the sheep; *this* is "the blood of the everlasting covenant," that gives immortality to what we do, and preserves it fresh and green, so that though dead we speak; *this* is "the blood of the everlasting covenant,"—God's immutable condition of Divine ministry, of helpful and effectual service, "who brought up the Lord Jesus to be the great Shepherd of the sheep, *through His blood.*"





## CHRIST'S WARNING AGAINST UNFAITHFULNESS.

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LUKE IX. 26.

“For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels.”

**I**F we accept this as a true report of what He said—and there is no reason, I apprehend, why we should not—it is evident that Jesus Christ believed Himself to be somebody, somebody altogether singular and unique among men—one standing entirely apart from, and towering immeasurably above them. He could not have spoken thus, except under the impression, and in the consciousness, that a greater than any mere human eminence or dignity was His. And supposing Him for a moment to have been self-deluded, what would He be but the very prince of madmen? However His utterance in the text may be explained, nothing, it seems to me, can possibly reconcile with it, homage to Him, or admiration of Him as a noble and beautiful soul, much less the existence of trust in Him, and reverence for Him as a religious Teacher, a moral and spiritual Guide,—*nothing* but faith in “the holy incarnation.”

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Now there are two questions for us to consider, viz. with respect to the warning given, and the anticipation expressed. What did He mean—*first*—in threatening to be ashamed of whomsoever should be found ashamed of Him and of His words? He was referring, the context shows plainly, not to those whom His lowly condition and His mean circumstances, prevented from recognising Him; who stood aloof in unbelief, refusing to credit His divine rank and mission; but to those who, in their hearts convinced concerning Him, and with their lips acknowledging Him, yet shrunk from casting in their lot with Him—shrunk from resigning themselves to follow His call and bear His yoke. You see, He has been asking the disciples to confess, whom they judged Him to be, in reply to which Simon Peter, answering for all, had said, “the Christ,” the anointed of God; and, receiving the ascription, tacitly admitting the correctness of the estimate, He straightway reminded them, that the inheritance of His glory must be preceded by the endurance of suffering; that He “must first suffer many things,” even to apparent overthrow and destruction; and that to obey Him and cleave to Him as the Christ, would involve *in their case* corresponding privation and sacrifice; that so only, —through a daily taking up of the Cross in fellowship with Him,—could they hope to live with Him the true, exalted, blessed life; whereas, if they declined to accept such a lot; if, while deeming Him to be the sent of God, they drew back fearfully from the hardness of that to which He

summoned them, and, unfaithful to conviction, chose present comfort and ease, rather than self-denial and pain for His sake, *then* theirs would be loss, great and terrible loss. They would save themselves much unpleasantness and severity, but at the expense, the awful expense, of losing participation with Him in His life. And here, by way of emphasis and illustration, He adds, "for whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed." Thus, they would be ashamed of Him in *acting as if* ashamed, viz. by shrinking from following Him while persuaded of His divine claim and authority; and He would be ashamed of them in *acting as if* ashamed, viz. by withdrawing Himself from them, by restraining Himself toward them, by forbidding them to partake in the blessings of His fulness; so that we have disloyalty to the Christ, whose kingship we perceive and acknowledge, threatened with the punishment of exclusion from sharing in the Christ. Fail to yield yourself to Him whom you see and feel to be the highest, and He will fail to be yielded to you.

But in what sense, under what aspect and circumstances? What did He mean,—*secondly*,—by representing infidelity to Him, as doomed to suffer such deprivation *when* He should "come in His own glory and in His Father's, and of the holy angels"? He was speaking, of course, of some future exaltation and enlargement for Him, in contradistinction to present comparative limitation and low-lying. It was not with Him just now, as it would

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be. He was destined to be considerably advanced and amplified, to acquire a much richer investiture, was *going*, through self-humiliation and self-surrender, to *come*—heightened and increased exceedingly—more mightily endued for imparting; yet, when He came thus, He asseverates, it could not be for any benefit or advantage of those, who had unworthily neglected to respond to the divinity which they saw in Him; *then*, to those who had withheld themselves from Him, notwithstanding their belief in Him, He would be inevitably shut and sealed. But what was this three-fold glory in which He anticipated being clothed? We are apt to think of it, perhaps, as consisting in some tremendous outward display, in some blaze of sensuous pomp and power, something that shall strike all eyes and thrill all hearts with awe; when He, from whom men have hid their faces, discovering in Him no beauty that they should desire Him, will appear so visibly radiant and imposing, so visibly crowned and magnificent, that to doubt His supreme rank and dignity, will be impossible. But the glory of Christ, and the Father, and the holy angels,—is it an object for the senses, is it a spectacle, like a royal pageant, or an exhibition of fireworks? Nay, can it ever be discerned at all, except with an opening of the interior vision, and by divinely purged and meetened souls? The things of God, says the Apostle, are spiritually discerned, and the natural man perceiveth them not. Did not the Lord Jesus come in His own glory at the beginning, although it shone forth then, only with tempered

ray, and, as it were, from behind a veil? And while St. John, and the few to whom it was given, beheld and worshipped, was it not so concealed from the worldly multitudes, that in their blindness they "crucified the Lord of glory;" and would any larger or more vivid forthshining of the same spiritual reality, suffice to make it more perceptible to those in whom the spiritual susceptibility is wanting? Let us clearly understand, that heavenly splendours are not to be seen at any time as material forms are seen, nor even as intellectual truths are seen, but that their visibility depends always upon contact with heavenly minds.

Now, what is *Christ's glory*,—His peculiar and sublime distinction? The fourth evangelist tells us that he and the others saw it, and that it was "full of grace and truth,"—full, that is, of helpfulness and instruction, of succour and enlightenment. But what was it? He alludes to it Himself, you will remember, in the well-known prayer which the same evangelist records, and says, "The glory which Thou gavest me, I have given *them*," meaning *those* who had then become, and *those* who would yet become, His disciples; and as the glory which He assigns to these, is, that they shall be His witnesses and representatives, going forth to proclaim and reflect Him; so was it not the glory laid upon Him, that He was sent to disclose—God and the Unseen? He *was* "God manifest in the flesh," "Emmanuel, God with us." He came declaring the Father—showing the Father. Yes, such is the supreme glory of Christ. If He be

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Redeemer, it is through being Revealer. "Thou hast given Me power," He said, "to give eternal life," "and this is life eternal, that they may know Thee," and "I have manifested Thy name, and will yet manifest it." The glory of Christ lies in the revelation which He is, and which He inspires, of divine verities; and when, while already unveiling something of these in His earthly life and teaching, He looks forward to a *future* coming in His own glory, the language implies, that *hitherto*, His revealing energy had not been fully put forth, that through Him greater things than at present were destined to be seen, that hereafter out from Him would flow still clearer and brighter light, as when He assured His apostles, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now;" "The time cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in parables, but I shall show you plainly of the Father;" "My Spirit shall guide you into all truth."

But if it be *His* special glory, that He reveals invisible realities; what is the glory of the Father, with which He anticipated being also invested? What else can it be but *the rule of His holy love*? Is not this the splendour of God, that He reigns over all, to the best interests of the world, in order to its ultimate redemption from sin and misery? The *Father* is, distinctively, He who rules in holy love, governing and commanding for the true welfare of the children. And was not this the joy set before Christ, which enabled Him to endure the Cross; that

when perfected through suffering, He should become crowned with power in heaven and earth, should be "made head over all things to the Church," should begin to exert beneficial sway and influence, should receive "authority to execute judgment" as the organ of God? "Have thou," He says in one of His parables, to the faithful servant, "have thou rule over ten cities, and so enter into the joy of thy Lord," viz. the joy of administering and managing benevolently for the general good. Christ has come, and is ever coming, not only in His own glory,—an abiding force of spiritual light and knowledge, for the illumining, purifying, and enlarging of human thought in relation to the highest subjects,—but in the glory also of the Father, having been made "the power of God for salvation," "all things being put in subjection under His feet," God working and ruling in Him "to reconcile all to Himself."

And what shall we say is the glory of the holy angels, which He likewise claimed should be His? Not golden wings, radiant faces, glistening robes, but *the beauty of ministry*. "Are they not all ministering spirits?" "He maketh His angels ministers;" "They are ministers of His that do His pleasure." This is the grand distinction of the angels, that they are perpetually employed in rendering service, in communicating and conveying help. And Christ coming in the glory of these, is Christ coming to make all things serve us, so that we may be always waited upon and succoured, whether by Paul, or Apollos, or

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Cephas—by the world, or life, or death, by things present, or things to come. He is to-day, and has been since His resurrection and ascension, the centre and source of more abundant revelation ; the organ of a righteous and loving rule, and the offerer of daily ministry to man. He has appeared, and is appearing, in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels,—*for all who can perceive it*; but the appearance is not perceptible, and never will be, either to mere bodily vision, or to unquickened souls. “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him.” We must have within us something of the Spirit of God, to be able to discern them. Do not presume to conclude that Christ has not come as He said He would, because you have not seen and cannot see it ; the question is, How are you looking for it, and what eyes have you to look with ? Are you gazing in the right direction to behold, or are you capable of receiving the divine light that shines, of feeling the righteous love that rules, or of being ministered to every day, by all things ?

For mark now, the doom which the Lord Jesus pronounces here, upon *unfaithfulness* to convictions : Shrink from following Me, and from taking up your Cross for Me, whose claim you are constrained to acknowledge ; and when I come shortly, in the fuller plenitude of My own glory, with the Father's and the angels' added thereto, I shall shrink from you ; in plain words, you will then be

excluded from participating,—*first*,—in *my wealth of revelation*. Unfaithfulness, He says, in effect, is fatal to spiritual discernment; where it exists, illumination is hindered; there will be no progress in truth, no growth in right perceptions—the divine can only convey itself with power, to the divinely surrendered and divinely consecrated minds. And infidelity to conscience or knowledge, dissipates and defiles, sinks one below the spiritual level from whence alone the things of God are capable of being seen and felt; nothing tends to impair and prevent vision of these like unfaithfulness. If, through indolence or self-love, from fear, or motives of worldly policy, you neglect to obey the commandment that has been revealed to you, or to cleave to the beauty that has unveiled to you its charms, endeavouring to withstand their influence, and to stifle your consciousness of them, turning from them and choosing something inferior or unworthy, as offering more comfort and ease, more secular gain,—then, and thereby, you are securing that Christ shall be ashamed of you when He comes in His glory; then, and thereby, you are incapacitating yourself for His revelations. “I understand more than the ancients,” said the Hebrew psalmist, “because I keep Thy precepts.” “He that doeth His will,” said Christ, “he shall know of the doctrine.” Let no unfaithful soul expect to be a seer; no, to him, it may be darkness at noonday. If you would follow on to know, if you crave more light and assurance concerning the realities

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that are invisible, if you hope and expect to find further revealings, and to be shown deeper secrets of the eternal, in the world beyond, where to the true heart it is promised, to see no longer through a glass darkly, but face to face; *be faithful*—bravely and unreservedly faithful to what is already granted you.

To be otherwise, says Christ again, is to exclude ourselves from the sense and enjoyment of that rule of holy love under which we live; the holy love will be ruling still, and always, but we shall be unable to realise it; it will be to us as though it were not; there will be on our part, no peaceful and happy inheritance of it; unfaithfulness will operate to disease and dis-temper vision, to render us sceptical with regard to the divinely beautiful order, commanding and controlling all, and the divinely beautiful purpose, slowly but surely fulfilling itself through all,—will operate to make life look meaner, darker, fiercer than it is, and to give to its crosses and disappointments, an aspect of *spitefulness*. Do we not know, have we never known in our own experience, that it is so—how any conflict with, and deviation from, one's best and highest impressions, from one's perceptions of the right and true, *does* tend to fling a shadow and a stain upon the scene, to break up the previous rest in the Lord's loving rule and gracious end, and to drive toward bitterness and unbelief? You have seen a family, in which everyone is contented and glad under the father's wise and good government, and conscious,

gratefully conscious, of being governed beneficently and well—everyone, but the wrong-doer, with the wrong spirit rankling in him; and *he* is dissatisfied and querulous; to *him* the government seems hard and cruel, and things are not managed and administered as they should be; *he* has no sense of the order of the father's house, and is cut off from sharing in its blessedness. And just thus is it with us under the government of God—the God in Christ, when disloyalty to conviction depraves us; the glory of the Father is obscured to us, the holy love becomes doubtful and unreal, and although in the midst of its workings and encircled by its arms, we have none of the joy of it.

And then, once more, unfaithful souls, we are warned, lose the daily ministry of things—that daily ministry which *He* promises and offers to us, who comes “in the glory of the holy angels;” and which He means us, and so long as we follow Him, enables us, to derive from them, for while we are His, “all things are ours;” but to be faithless to the spiritual light and the heavenly knowledge, is to miss their service. It is only as we are loyal to conscience and God, that *they* are loyal to us, waiting upon us and yielding us use and sweetness from day to day. To the *true* soul they are true servants, so that sunshine and gloom—pleasant scenes and painful—gratifications and vexations, blows and caresses, alike contribute to his nourishment; but when the truth or the right, that has been shown us, is indolently disregarded, or unworthily retreated from and for-

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saken, with a view to smooth paths for the feet; —*then* how perverse things are found, how irritating or depressing the unavoidable crosses — how deteriorating, instead of beneficial, the days, with their medley of circumstance, and how even the sun refuses to comfort and bless as it was wont. If you would not be shut out from participating in the threefold glory of Christ, *be faithful*—be faithful to the Christ you *see*; for “whosoever,” He says, “shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He cometh in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels.”





## TALKING IT OVER WITH CHRIST.

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MARK vi. 30.

"And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told Him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught."

**T**HEY had been for some time separated from Christ. He had sent them away by two and two upon a mission,—to proclaim the message, and to show the signs of the approaching kingdom, among the numerous towns and villages of their native province; and this excursion of theirs, while devised to meet the needs of the surrounding people,—to give them light and blessing,—was meant also, there can be little doubt, for the benefit of the ambassadors themselves. *They* were to be educated and edified by it; and not merely through trying to teach what they had learned, and to minister and do good, in imitation of Him at whose feet they had been sitting; but through trying to teach and minister, *alone*, cut off from the influence and help of His presence. It was necessary, in order to their becoming healthy and stalwart Christ's-men, that they should not continue for ever at Christ's side, but that with something of Him,—something of His

principles, His spirit, His wisdom and grace sown and sunk in them, they should begin to exercise, at a distance from Him, clear of the support of His mighty personality. So only would they be able to grow up into Him,—even by a suspension, a temporary suspension, of their intercourse with Him.

There is a possibility of being too much with the Lord, of having Him too constantly visible and audible. Pious people are wont to talk about the blessedness of being under a perpetual sense and impression of Him, but the thing is never done, and it is a blessing that it is not, and cannot be, since it would just operate to prevent our obeying Him, copying Him, and surrendering to Him, in a free way. We should follow Him as in a dream, as beneath a spell, without choice, effort, or application; there would not be sufficient naturalness, sufficient self-giving and moral consent in our daily conformity, to constitute it *character*. "It is expedient for you that I go away," is true for us, no less than it was once for the first disciples. To unfold and advance out of Christ, and upon the foundation of Christ, we must be often leaving, forgetting, losing sight of Him, in absorption with circumstances and activities, that shall afford opportunity for the educement and exercise of that which we have imbibed from Him during previous conscious contact and communion. I would not carry with me an unceasing view and vision of Him if I could; it would be too forcible to allow of vital growth, too overpowering to be productive of strength. Neither would I have my child learn

to practise my precepts, and to carry out my ideas, always and only under my eye—always and only with my presence pressing upon him; he must be set free of me sometimes—must be left to choose and try, amidst temptations and difficulties, in my absence also; otherwise, however subject he may be to me, I shall never be livingly formed in him; there will be obedience, but it will not be thoroughly moral; there will be a gradual shaping, but not a real development, and the grace to which he may attain will never be his own. The angels in heaven, who stand day and night before the throne, are sent forth to minister *outside*, that the radiance they catch from the excellent glory may be wrought *into* them, and that they may have liberty to *become*, and not be *made merely*. The God who is revealed to us in Christ, is, withal, somewhat reserved and restrained, one who hides Himself while He shines, upon the face of whose splendour there lies a veil and a covering.

But the apostles,—separated from the Master for a season, in the course of their training by Him, not alone for the profit of others, but equally for their own,—have now returned from the excursion, and are found “gathering themselves together to Him to tell Him all things, both what they have done, and what they have taught.” And how beautiful the readiness, the bold unshrinking readiness, they show, to rehearse their proceedings at His feet, and to go over the whole story with Him! How suggestive of the patience, the tenderness, the thoughtful forbearance and sympathy with which He had

habitually treated them, and in reliance on which, they had learned to be frank and fearless in exposing themselves before Him—had learned not to be afraid to tell Him everything. Had they been accustomed to find Him, at times, stern and harsh in His criticisms, unable to make due allowance for their ignorances and infirmities, apt to be exacting or censorious, they might well have felt reluctant to give any detailed account of their raw missionary efforts, might well have felt inclined to shirk presenting a full report, and have held their peace timidly; at all events, until He began to *question* them; for could they be certain, when once they stood in His presence and met His gaze again, could they be certain—whatever their previous complacency may have been—that they had not failed or blundered in some things; would it not seem probable to them that with such immature knowledge, and with such rude prentice-hands as theirs, the work done by them, though ever so sincerely and earnestly, would be found, under the Master's inspection, to exhibit some defects and flaws? It could hardly be otherwise, one would think, and their unhesitating readiness, notwithstanding, nay, their eagerness to spread it out before Him, shows the sweet confidence in Him, which the unvarying gentleness and charity of His judgments had inspired. And yet it is possible, after all, that they had come back only *too* satisfied with themselves, their minds undisturbed by the least suspicion of anything lacking or imperfect in the discharge of the commission. Very possibly

they had made haste to see the Lord, in the swell and elation of the feeling that they had done remarkably well, that nothing could have been better, and that He would be wonderfully gratified with them; for it is not in our first youthful sallies that self-criticism is most searching and severe, but later on, when the raw recruit has developed into the skilled veteran, and the prentice-hand has acquired tact and cunning. Modesty grows with the growth of gift and power. The more perfectly we learn to work, the more alive we become to the imperfections of our work. What ripe and dexterous elder does not remember the happy conceit of his early days, when ignorance felt so wise, and rough performance seemed so finished and fair? Had the apostles been older and more experienced labourers in the field, they would have been more likely to feel dissatisfied with their achievements, and fearful lest in anything they had erred or failed. As it was only their first young attempt, they may have returned in a state of delightful self-content—anxious to let Christ hear how wonderfully they had wrought, how famously they had succeeded. And if it were so, what could one have more desired for them, for their teaching and education, than that they should go and talk it all over with Him? Of what service, we exclaim, will such an interview be to them, tending to correct without disheartening, to humble without shaming, and to leave them with truer ideas of themselves and their quality, and higher and juster conceptions of the

work to which they have been called, than they had before ; wiser and more lowly, and yet withal, not sadder nor embittered men. Happy apostles! whom we see passing in to recount and dwell upon their late doings, in the presence of the Lord.

A review of our activities, especially when we have been engaged in any earnest, serious work, and even at the close of *any* period of occupation and effort ; a review of our activities is always desirable, and often of great importance and value. It reveals points, sometimes, of much interest and moment, in connection with them, which otherwise would never be observed. It brings out little things, little, instructive, and suggestive things, perhaps, not noticed in the bustle and excitement of performance, and the rescue of which depends upon our *looking back*. It makes the scene clearer, in a cooler, calmer light, and gives us a truer impression and estimate of it than we had while standing in the midst of it. There is frequently a wonderful change ; a change in size, in relative proportion, in form and hue ; as when an overhanging mist lifts and rolls away from the landscape ! And then, above all, the review enables us to scan and survey *ourselves* in action, as we could not at the time, during the progress of the action. We turn round and face ourselves, and quietly take note of our own bearing and carriage, and the grace or awkwardness of our own motions ; we perceive how we looked, *out yonder*, the shape into which we ran,

under such and such pressure, the figure which, with such and such doings, we flung against the sky; and the object then descried, how strange it is often, how different from the picture that we had had in our mind, almost like the new, unexpected face of which one catches sight on first turning to the glass after a long wasting sickness. "Can this be myself?" we cry, disappointed and distressed. Has not the retrospect, the grave and serious retrospect, of some situation or passage in your history, often discovered to you features in yourself which you had not previously suspected—deformities in attitude or blemishes in movement, that had escaped you at the time? You have found yourself out; and less to your gratification than your surprise, have gained a truer self-knowledge and self-measurement. We miss the divinely-intended lessons and admonitions of our activities, unless we *review* them. They throw off continually, indications, revelations of ourselves, which we must *look back* to see.

But then much depends upon the light under which we place them. It makes all the difference in the world, whether you turn on the gas, or let in the sunshine. The complexion of the thing that shows fairly enough in the blaze of the former, in the sheen of the latter, may wear a very poor and shabby appearance. How often has the morning altogether spoiled for us the seeming beauty of the evening before? There is a dull, sluggish, sleepy way of reflecting upon the past, that serves no purpose, and yields no profit. You sit by the

fire, and wander dreamily over the scenes and doings of the day, or rather, suffer them to glide through you, instead of going back through them; and nothing is disclosed, nothing learnt; the revealings remain hidden from you, the enfolded lessons escape you. There is little utility in such drowsy reveries.

Then, further, you may *actively* review, only with a false, bad light, that distort or disguises things, or leads you astray in wrong directions, to wrong conclusions, soothing you when you ought to be disturbed, and satisfying you when you ought to feel the pain of discontent or shame. For example, one takes with him a morbid vanity, a greedy ravening love of approbation, and looks upon what he has been doing under the influence of that: as when a public teacher recalls and examines his late utterances, with the anxiety supreme in his mind to ascertain how he himself appeared to others; to decide what the audience would be likely to think, not of the subject, but of *him*, of his ability and skill—noting therefore, only the signs that had been given of their appreciation of the discourse; mourning only over the apparently slight impression which he produced, or the slips that might be calculated to injure his fame; and estimating his work by the probable result of honour and applause to himself; thus getting no clear idea, from the review, of the real worth of his deliverance, or its real shortcomings and defects; content, perhaps, where he should have been regretful, and humiliated and troubled in directions

towards which he should scarcely have cared to glance. Or you reflect upon your conduct in certain situations, under the influence of a low moral standard, and beneath the guidance of axioms and opinions, of principles and fashions that rule in corrupt society, and when such is the light to which you bring your doings for inspection, the inspection is rendered useless for any true teaching, for any good service. You do not see the mistakes that are full of rebuke, the faults that need to be corrected, and you go down to your house, like the blind Pharisee from the Temple, crying "Peace," in the midst of disorder and disease.

Everything depends upon the light in which we conduct our review, upon the presence in which we stand; and when our own hearts are insufficient, when their lamp has got somewhat out of sorts, has grown dull and flickering, and does not work well, Providence occasionally sends us help in the shape of *illuminating circumstances*; we fall into depths of misfortune and adversity; we are laid aside upon the bed of sickness, are brought down, for healing, to the gates of death; and then, often, what strange new views we get of things that have been done. How differently have they shaped themselves, surveyed from the grave's brink; how much less perfect, how much more faulty than they seemed before. Or when some great sorrow has softened and humbled us, with what other eyes have we found ourselves looking back upon them; what disenchantments have we

undergone with regard to them. There is nothing like calamity to subdue our estimate of them, when, perchance, it has been too high; to make visible to us defects in them previously unrecognised. And who has not felt it a good and useful corrective, however painful, to revolve them in the stillness, the solemn stillness, of the sick chamber? Ah me! that is a point of view, from which many a sad discovery is made with respect to past activity, from which many a once-admired passage in the life, has assumed a strangely altered aspect. It is well to be caught away into the valleys of weeping sometimes, and sometimes to be stricken down faint and weak; and once, perhaps, in the course of our history, to sink within the shadow of death; if only for the sake of beholding all things, both what we have done and what we have taught, under such penetrating, revealing light.

There are presences, too, which it is open to us to seek for ourselves, for the purpose of aiding us in retrospect. How helpful it might be, to go over much, with some wise, noble, trusted friend; to sit and review on occasions, with him, in his pure and tender atmosphere, in contact with his grace and truth; to ask him to hear, while we told our story, and sought to catch and apply its lessons. True, there are few such to be found, and the best would not always suffice; but it would be often advantageous to bring our performances to their light, and to contemplate and examine in fellowship with them. Then, again, how beneficially might some mean, worldly ways in which we have been walk-

ing—or some gaudy, showy, noisy, and withal hollow works that we have wrought—how beneficially might these be carried with us into the midst of nature's simplicity and purity, to quiet woods, or solitary mountain slopes, on listening summer evenings, and be spread out there. Have you never felt the wretchedness of pretence, the vulgarity of worldliness, the filth of trickery and deceit, in the presence of a sunset at sea, or under the gaze of a still, star-lit sky?

But the apostles gathered themselves together *unto Jesus*. They brought their activities into the light of *His* presence; and was not that the very best thing that they could do, if they wanted to estimate them rightly, and to understand and profit by their teaching? To whom could they have gone with them, to have them manifested so truly, and made so instructive, as they would be in retirement with Him? Happy is he, whose custom and whose comfort it is to go in to the Lord, from time to time, for the purpose of showing Him all things, and reviewing and pondering his life before Him. There is nothing so preservative, nothing so stimulating or strengthening; and a brave and grand thing it is, to be *able* to bring what we have done to Him, and to speak of it, to display and expose it, kneeling at His feet; not because we are proud of it and satisfied with it, but because we are anxious to learn thus what manner of work it really is; to see, beneath the surface, into the depths of it; to find out how it bears the test of

being looked upon, and dwelt upon, in the sacred air of communion with Him; and if it prove to be unworthy in any degree, or if we have already known it to be unworthy, then to see the unworthiness *fully* and *vividly*, and to feel it as it should be felt, with shame and grief that may lead to greater care, and be productive of improvement in the future.

I say it is a brave and grand thing, to be *able* to do this; taking note, by the way, of what we shrink from reporting, and what we would fain be silent concerning, and compelling ourselves to declare *it*, as *that* which especially needs to be declared; not that He may know it, to whom it lies open in all its features, whether we refer to it or not, but that *we* may know it as it really is, and become incapable of repeating and returning to it. It would be wonderfully preservative against imperceptible declension and degeneracy, against sliding into habits of faultiness, and gradually and insensibly becoming established in them;—it would be wonderfully preservative against such mischief, were we to accustom ourselves, again and again, to tell the Lord all things, both what we have done, and what we have taught; to relate them to Him, saying, "O Lord, I have acted thus and thus in social intercourse, in my family relations, in my business transactions, in the pursuit of my profession or my studies to-day." How revealing would be the exercise; what a conscience-quickenings and life-controlling influence would it have upon us, far better, far more real and more worth, than

those *general* confessions of sin, those vague, sweeping condemnations of ourselves which we are wont to utter, and with which we are wont to *bury* our specific acts and behaviours out of sight. Do not cry henceforth in your devotions, "O Lord, I am a miserable sinner," but, instead of that, *relate* at His feet, what you have been about; go through it all with Him, report yourself in detail, as the apostles did when they gathered themselves together to Jesus; and then, as the story of your activity unfolds itself in the light of His countenance, you shall see and feel what your defects and unworthiness have really been; how far you have been the "miserable sinner," needing to weep and repent, and how far, the faithful and obedient child, called upon to rejoice and give thanks for the grace that has enabled you.

Let us seek to do this. We shall find the rich, help and benefit of it; and our sufficient strength for it, will be found in the remembrance, that He to whom we are to speak freely, *is our Father*;—our Father, who not only discerns and passes judgment upon all, before we give an account of it, but who *loves* us, and can make *allowance* for us, and is anxious to educate us out of evil, into meetness for fellowship with Himself.







## THE FELLOWSHIP OF CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS.

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PHILIPPIANS iii. 10.

"That I may know . . . the fellowship of His sufferings."

**T**HAT is to say, *participation* in them. Christ, then, did not suffer what He suffered, that we might be discharged from suffering it; did not endure certain pains in our stead, that we might escape them; otherwise St. Paul could not have yearned as he did to be admitted to drink of His cup. The Lord Jesus came compassionating those whom He found afflicted and tormented, and often stretched forth His hand to relieve them. Moreover, with the growth and progress of His kingdom, suffering *does* tend to abate, *is* increasingly relaxed and mitigated, and with the final complete fulfilment of His kingdom, will surely altogether disappear. Yet the purpose for which He bore the cross, was *not* our ease, was *not* our exemption from the cross. He came to conquer the disorder, to drive out the wrongness, of which suffering is but an echo and sign. He sacrificed Himself "to put away *sin*;" and it is only as *sin* is put away, that suffering can diminish and cease. Our emancipation from it

depends upon our emancipation from sin ; in other words, upon our establishment in creaturely rightness, which consists in recognising,—in acquiescing with, and submitting to, Divine laws.

Pain is symptomatic—symptomatic of the want of conformity to law. Nothing can extirpate it from the world, but a reduction of the world's dislocations; which latter is the end and aim of Christ crucified, and not for the sake of our deliverance from the misery of the pain, but because such dislocations are *themselves* degradation and shame; and their cure, grace, and beauty, and eternal life. In the meanwhile we suffer, not less since the Redeemer's passion, than before, except in so far as He has prevailed to subdue the might of sin, to influence us to search out and concur with and follow the laws of the great Father. In the meanwhile we suffer, "every transgression and disobedience receiving its just recompense of reward;" and most Divine is the mercifulness thereof. Together with all Thy works, our troubles and distresses praise Thee, O God! For what worse thing, what more terrible thing, could happen to us, than that *these* should be entirely removed, were it possible, without any previous removal of *sin*? They are the means of teaching, and warning, and convincing us concerning it; of leading us to restrain ourselves in indulging it; of saving us from being insensibly beguiled by it; from sinking, unchecked and unhindered, into the death to which it tends.

I would not that my little child, with his wayward impulses and irregular propensities, should be able

to touch fire and incur no smart for it; for then how soon might he be consumed by it! The smart of the first contact, is his preservative and safeguard, and awakens him to the wrongness of the venture. And who would wish that the world's disorder should yield no pain, that it could be left to move on in its foul and evil courses, *painlessly*? Then how soon might it rot and perish in them! No. Let us be thankful, that so long as sin remains untaken away, more or less of suffering remains. In our, as yet, unrightened realm, its pricks are serviceable, and cannot be spared. There is something worse, infinitely worse, than the sharpest of them, viz. to disintegrate and fall to pieces, in pangless ease. Hence our Lord, with all His pity for the afflicted, and His frequent succour of them, did not betray any desire or purpose to put an end to suffering; did not give Himself to release every sufferer whom He encountered. Nay, multitudes whom He might have relieved with a word, He passed over, leaving them in their groans and tears. The porches of Bethesda were filled with a *number* of impotent and sick folk, yet He only healed *one* of them; and whenever you see Him healing, here and there, it is evident that there is something deeper which He has in view,—that His grand object is *moral*. He was manifestly in no anxious haste that the people should be delivered from all pain, and made at once comfortable and happy in their circumstances, but was quite content that there should be burden and sorrow, as He knew

would be, must be, until the redemption from unrighteousness was complete.

But then, further—according to the Apostle's view and impression—Christ suffered what He suffered, not that we might be delivered from it, but, on the contrary, that we might be brought into it, that we might come to suffer *with Him*. He bore the cross, not that we might never bear it, but that we might learn to bear it. His advent and presence did indeed *stir up* pains—*new* pains, that had not shaken the sphere of humanity before. What agitation and strife He caused in the kingdom of Judæa! How constantly was He sending men from Him, perplexed and disquieted, sad and ill at ease, with strange aching discontents and dissatisfactions wrought in them, full of doubt, where previously all had been confidence, full of anxiety, where previously there had been no tremor of solicitude or pulse of care; and after His death and resurrection, how profoundly unsettled, and fiercely divided and harassed did the country become through Him; what commotions and disunions there were, traceable to Him; while under the preaching of Him, again and again, thousands who had lived composed were thrown into distress, and made to cry out with anguish of heart. Yes, He came not to extinguish, but to add to, the suffering that was already in the world; to set men breathing groans and writhing in torments, that they had never known until He was revealed to them.

And how is it still? We cannot see and believe Him, without being introduced into some-

thing of new suffering, without learning to weep as we had not wept, without learning to bear as we had not borne. We cannot begin to be rightened by Him, without being plunged into conflict with the wrongness that remains, and becoming more or less stricken and bruised by it. To recognise in Him the divine, and to aspire towards it, is to suffer; and not *only* in *struggles* with the low and evil that are in us, with tendencies and infirmities that pull the other way; for however in time, these may be subdued and mastered, and the higher life grow strong to breathe with freedom, and work at large with its old enemies beneath its feet,—however this may be, we must still suffer under the evil that lingers in the world: the greater its evil the greater will be our suffering, so long, at least, as the Christ is alive and vigorous within us; so long as He is alive and vigorous within us, it will hurt us in many ways. The sense and impression of its disorder will be a trouble to us, a taste of affliction in our cup, a sword in our bones. With the Spirit of the Lord enlightening and purifying us, we cannot be happy as others may be, who are not so enlightened and purified. In the midst of unrighteousness, in the midst of a world whose ways are not just and equal, its iniquity must need be *laid upon us* to some extent. And then, unable to refrain from meddling with it, in attempts to heal and rectify; compelled in our degree, to speak out, to be faithful, to set forth and bring to bear things belonging to salvation that have been revealed to us; compelled

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often to take a stand, to protest, to endeavour to reform, to minister, to save,—there comes upon us all manner of penalties and pains; the resistance, the opposition, the persecution of evil,—anxiety, disappointment, temptation, the necessity perhaps of submitting to loss, to self-denial, and sacrifice. Some men may suffer more than others, just because they happen to be brought by circumstances, into more frequent or more sharp collision with some form or spirit of evil that reigns—because their position or line of life exposes them more; some, because they are so much more intensely Christened, so much more powerfully swept and swayed by the inspiration of the Redeemer, so much more right and noble in soul.

There is no being at all *right* in a world of *wrong*, without coming under some trial and stripes for it; without becoming in a measure, now and then, on this side or that, crucified with Christ; more especially, in the sense of being burdened with Him on account of the manifold wrongness that prevails, and of enduring with Him the manifold painfulness of seeking to do good, to heal, and cleanse, and save. And this is what He seeks—not to spare us from suffering, but to bring us into participation with His sufferings; so to enter into us with His quickening, purifying breath, that we, with holy and loving hearts, with pure and lofty impulses, may enter somewhat into His pains; so to communicate Himself to us that we may, in consequence of our reception of Him, fall under and continue to bear His cross, until the

cross shall be no more in the world because there shall be no more sin. He suffered that we might learn to feel His own pangs.

And now, we are prepared to understand and appreciate the aspiration of St. Paul,—that he might “know the fellowship of His sufferings.” It was not that he wanted to be put to pain, because Christ had been put to pain; that he had an ambition to be made uncomfortable, as though the experience of discomfort were *in itself* a fine thing,—a thing to be cultivated and sought for. The Apostle had no idea that there was any virtue or praise in suffering—that to be scourged, was a thing to be aimed at or gloried in. He never courted it, or threw himself in the way of it, that it might come upon him, but he rather took measures to escape it, when he could: he had enough of it indeed, without seeking it—“in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness;” yet here he is, yearning to know the fellowship of his Lord’s sufferings.

What, then, does he mean? He wanted to enter yet more deeply into that Spirit of Christ,—that Spirit of holy love, which, in an evil world, necessarily involves suffering to have *more* of His unselfish devotion to the cause of God and man; to feel *more* with Him, the leprosy and disharmony of sin, and to follow Him *more* closely in His righteous concern with regard to it, and His earnest activity against it. This is what

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he meant. Oh, for more of the pain-entailing *character* and *goodness* of the Master; for more of His cross-involving grace and quality! It was not the mere anguish he craved, but the grand moral heart, the grand moral sympathies and affections which the anguish expressed and implied, and which could not be had without it.

The sufferings of Christ were the outcome of His holy love in contact with a realm of wrongness and sin. And by observing whether under certain circumstances, men laugh or weep, are distressed or at ease, you can tell what manner of men they are; by their tears or smiles, by their composure or affliction, they stand betrayed. That some men whom you meet, are tranquil and content, is indicative of their badness, their littleness. That others whom you meet, are troubled and sorrowful, is the evidence of their goodness, their nobleness. In a world like ours—in a world in which there is so much evil deranging and polluting it, so much unrighteousness crying with an exceeding great and bitter cry to be rectified; to be wholly at rest and quiet, argues an inferior and Christless soul. The condemnation of thousands is that they are so happy, that they are not vexed and tearful, that they do not groan. See them in the midst of a society that loves falsehood, and cannot bear the truth, that decries all lofty enthusiasm, and demands conformity to unworthy usages;—*and not suffering*. See them in the presence of fashionable follies and vices, of popular bad customs and base creeds;—*and not suffering*.

See them living surrounded by want and misery, by injustice and iniquity, by wicked obstacles to liberty and progress;—*and not suffering*. What a revelation it is of their unworthiness. How much more should we all suffer than we do, if only we were somewhat better, somewhat diviner than we are. Thank God, there are many among us who in Christ-like greatness of soul, in their devotion to truth and love, are not without some knowledge of the fellowship of Christ's sufferings; men, unable to rest, for the disorder and transgression that abound; men taking to their hearts the cause of the destitute, the down-trodden, the degraded; men troubling and burdening themselves about the wrongs of the oppressed, the difficulties of the poor, the education and salvation of the outcast, the purification of social morals and manners; men enduring patiently obloquy and scorn, the attacks of prejudice, the slander of the multitude, the brand of folly, or the stigma of heresy, in endeavouring to widen liberty, to raise the people, to set free religion, to remove stumblingblocks out of the way of the Lord's coming, or to expound things which they believe to be right and true. Are *we* sufficiently Christ-like to have any fellowship with them, and with Christ; or are we living in peace and quietness, never encountering a storm, never involved in odium, or plagued with benevolent anxieties and cares, *because* we are not enough surrendered to and in sympathy with Him, because there is not enough of the pure and honest heart within us?

We all *do* suffer indeed more or less; but the question is, Whence comes our suffering? Why are we troubled? Upon what do we expend our sighs and tears? Some people's sufferings are anything but tokens of their nobleness; they indicate rather their littleness and shame. They are rarely in travail and pain except about a pet dog or cat, dress or personal advantage, means and sources of amusement, imagined affronts to themselves, or about getting into society and getting money. If they could but be in travail and pain *like that*, on account of the sin and misery that are in the world, what different qualities would it imply, how blessed and divine would be their groans then, and to what blessed and divine work would those holy love-groans impel, yea, and what fulness of light, and fulness of joy too, would be found in it. Christ suffered, that we might be quickened and purified to learn to suffer with Him—to suffer with Him the suffering of Christ-like souls, in a confused and evil-ridden world.

Now, brethren, we may not be able to agree in our *views* with respect to the Redeemer's sufferings. You may not be able to concur and sympathise exactly with my explanation of them; nay, I do not profess to expound them; doubtless, there are heights and depths in connection with them which none of us have reached, and may never reach. I do but endeavour to show you, again and again, aspects in which they present themselves to me, glimpses which my eyes have caught. More I cannot do, and you must not be

vexed if it seem to you less than you perceive. But while we may not always understand alike, the sufferings of Christ, in one thing we may unite, viz. in seeking to know more of the fellowship of them; and *that*, after all, is the greatest thing; for in pursuing and entering into that knowledge, and only so, shall we be fulfilling the end of His sufferings. Without it, no other knowledge is of much account; in acquiring it, we are learning everything, for it is thus, and thus alone, that we shall really know Him. Nothing will bring us so near to Him, or lead us so surely and deeply into the secrets of Him, as coming under His burden, and sharing with Him in His cross and pain. So, evidently, felt St. Paul; his cry to know Christ, passing at once into the prayer that he might know the fellowship of His sufferings; as though he had said, "Thus alone can I know Him;" in accordance with His own words: "Whosoever will be My disciple, let him take up his cross and follow Me;" and again: "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His;" and again: "That being rooted and grounded in love, we may be able to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge."

Companionship in sorrow, forms the closest and most endearing of ties. Hearts that bleed beneath the same burden, that are consumed by the same passion, become united as no other hearts are. Nothing draws together like suffering together. You dream that you know the Lord Jesus in merely contemplating the message and

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receiving the revelation of His cross ; but you do not, until you have learned to *bear* it with Him. You expect to know Him hereafter, when once you leave the body, and get into the world beyond ; but you will not, except you have learnt in some measure to *experience His pain*. You reply, perhaps, "Ah, but in heaven I shall see Him as He is, without a veil between." And again I answer, "No, you will not, unless you have learned to suffer with Him," for the veil that hides Him is not the body, but the selfish, unloving, unchristened soul. Change of place will not reveal Him ; nothing can do that but change into His spirit. There is not the slightest prospect of your ever knowing Him more than now, except as you grow more, towards the likeness of His self-sacrificing, suffering love ; and, without *some* assimilation to it, you do not know Him *at all* ; "for what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man that is in him ?" Some men who have never even heard His name as yet, may be nearer to Him, through their enthusiasm of humanity, and their travail for the kingdom of righteousness, than many who celebrate His praises every Sunday ; at all events, *they* are the *nearest* to Him, whoever they are, who are most profoundly *with* Him in His sufferings.

His love is a love that passes knowledge ; it can only be understood by imitating it, by rising into unison and sympathy with it. It is in vain that we sit here, meditating upon His truth, and adoring His cross, and celebrating His

self giving charity, in psalms and hymns,—and do no more. We shall never really know Him until we go forth to weep and endure with Him. There is more of Him, present, in a single act of ministry to the destitute, the miserable, or the depraved, done out of a heart burdened with their need, than there is in a thousand confessions of faith. Where love is, there is He in the midst, though it be but a common chamber. Where it is wanting, no temple, however goodly and sacred, contains Him. Every good thing has its conditions. 'Nothing is given, all is sold; and if you would fain know Christ, you must conform to the conditions, you must pay the price.

But is it possible for us *all* to suffer with Him, as St. Paul did, for instance? Well, no; perhaps not. Many have not sufficient breadth and force of nature to yearn and grieve so much; they are not capable,—whatever their loyalty to Christ, and sincerity and devotion to righteousness,—they are not capable of so great a passion. It will always be but *the few*, who will be found entering abundantly into the fellowship of His sufferings, giving themselves grandly to the cause of God and man. We are not *all* equal to breaking our hearts and consecrating our lives in that cause, true-hearted as we may be in our measure, according to our degree. Yet, to know the Lord Jesus *at all*, we must to *some* extent feel with Him the pang and burden of His cross. There is no other way of knowing Him; and Heaven will not stoop and bend for those who

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cannot climb—will not lower its price, or reduce the terms of admission, to let in those who have not wherewith to pay.

To know aught of Christ, there must be some suffering with Him; and if His love has been at all revealed to us, if we have found, and are finding in Him, the merciful Father, the forgiving God, the great salvation which He declares,—then, we shall be constrained to struggle, and fight, and weep with Him, under the pressure of a sin-wrung world, be it ever so feebly and imperfectly; while desiring evermore, a yet fuller and deeper knowledge of the fellowship of *His* sufferings “who *Himself* bore our sins.”





## ZACCHÆUS RECEIVING SALVATION.

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LUKE xix. 9.

“And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.”

**Y**OU know well *the story* with which these gracious words are bound up. It is familiar enough—a picture painted for ever on the eye of the world, and we have already studied it together more than once. The anxiety of Zacchæus, the superintendent of customs in the district of Jericho, to obtain a good view of Christ as He passed through the town in the midst of the crowd; the expedient to which the man was driven, by reason of his short stature, for the purpose of securing his object; our Lord's quick detection of him among the branches of the sycamore-tree into which he had climbed, and the sudden, unexpected call to him to come down, and entertain the famous Prophet whom he had striven so hard to see; his joyful response to the call, and the immediate entrance of the two into his house, amidst the expressed surprise of the people that a divine messenger like Jesus of Nazareth, should have gone *from them*, to be guest with one whom

they esteemed a *sinner*; his defence of himself against their open-mouthed aspersions, with the statement, that in every instance in which he had been guilty of unjust exactions, he was making restitution, and that the half of his wealth he gave to the poor;—*then*, from the lips of our Saviour, the words we have just read, which I would fain have us endeavour to understand—to understand especially, in their application to the person to whom they were addressed.

Let us ask, *first*, therefore, in what sense this day was a day of salvation for Zacchæus. It could not be the mere circumstance of Christ having crossed his threshold that had produced such an effect; for a visit from Christ was not necessarily thus influential. He crossed many a threshold in the course of His wanderings, without bringing salvation to those at whose tables He sat. Simon the leper, for example, does not appear to have inherited a blessing in receiving Him. On the occasion of our Lord's sojourn under his roof, the only blessing that fell, fell not upon the master of the house, but upon the head of the strange woman from the streets. How was it, then, that the tax-gatherer of Jericho derived salvation from the coming of Christ; in what way was he saved thereby?

To answer the question, we feel that we want to know something more about him, than the narrative *explicitly* tells us. It gives so little information with regard to the man. There were circumstances, doubtless, in connection with

the case, which, if only they could be ascertained, might afford a sufficient key to the Redeemer's words, and enable us to see what they meant in reference to His host. Yet, since these words have been preserved for our learning, meagre as the narrative looks, it must surely contain some *hints*, by following which, light will be gained. We may not find what is needed for our guidance; expressly stated, but there will be enough, surely, in the shape of incidental allusion, from which we may infer it; otherwise, the teaching of the words is lost to us. It seems to me, indeed, that the story of Zacchæus, in common with other stories related in the Gospels, is an outline, which has been divinely drawn,—that is, under divine direction and inspiration,—with a view to its being filled up by careful consideration, and a thoughtful working out on our part, of the slightest intimation or suggestion; and that in attempting to do this with a sincere and devout heart, for the purpose of apprehending as far as possible the real significance and power of our Lord's utterance, we may hope to receive from His Spirit some help toward the formation of a true picture. Let us try, at all events, by imagining, from such touches as are given, the peculiar features of Zacchæus; let us try to obtain an idea of the salvation that came to him with the visit of Christ.

Now observe; ought we not to conclude at starting, that the publican's speech in the verse immediately preceding the text, was a declaration of what he was *in the habit of doing*? It has

often been regarded, I am aware, as a declaration of his resolve for the future—a resolve to which he had been brought in the course of the Saviour's interview with him, under the quickening, purifying influence of His presence and teaching. But I cannot understand it thus. The narrative certainly seems to convey, that the statement was made *not* at the close of the interview, or in the midst of it, after the divine Guest had somewhat impressed Himself upon His host, *but* on their first entering into the house, while the multitude who had followed them, were yet clamouring at the door, and in protest against their condemnatory judgment. They were all murmuring and saying, "He is gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner." "And Zacchæus stood"—or stood forth; the expression implying something formal—"Zacchæus stood forth and said, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore fourfold." I must think that here was a statement, not of what he determined to do, but of what he did—not a *pledging* of himself in surrender to the constraint of his visitor, but rather, a *defending* of himself in reply to the disparaging remarks of his neighbours. He *had* been covetous of gain, and had been unjust and dishonest at times in snatching at it; but it was no longer so. There had been a change. He had learnt to see the iniquity of over-reaching and defrauding, and was striving to make amends wherever he was conscious of having injured by extortion; while instead of

hoarding greedily, as he does not deny he once did, the wealth that *remained* to him, as the honest product of his office—an office which in the balsam-growing district of Jericho, could not fail to be lucrative—*this* he was spending largely in merciful ministries and deeds of charity.

Here, then, was a man, in whom earnest moral convictions had been stirred, and who, under their pressure, was trying to be good—trying to atone for the evil past, of which he was painfully sensible, and to work out his redemption from it. He had been led to repent and aspire, most likely, by that rousing, searching voice which had gone out into all the land, and had awakened from their death in worldliness and sin, some of all classes, viz. the voice of John the Baptist. We are told, that among others of every rank and name, whom his ministry had shaken into pangs of spiritual anxiety, and so prepared for the revelation of the Son of God, there were “publicans also who came to be baptized,” and that when they asked him, “Master, and what shall we do?” he said, “Exact no more than is appointed you.”

Zacchæus, the chief of the publicans in the department of Jericho, reimbursing where he had charged unfairly, and endeavouring, in the place of former injustice and rapacity, to be a messenger of blessing to the needy,—was, very probably, one of those whom the stern preacher had influenced; the thunder cries and solemn warnings of the “voice in the wilderness” had convinced him of sin, had startled him out of his devotion to

material gain, into some feeling of "things not seen and eternal"—God, truth, righteousness—and had driven him in fear and trembling, to cleanse himself, by amending his ways, according to the Baptist's word. You can imagine him, honestly and earnestly seeking to do well, to be a true and good man, as he had not been.

But now mark the disadvantages and discouragements under which he laboured. Notwithstanding all that he did, he could not overcome the strong prejudice which the people generally, entertained against persons of his class; his fellow-townsmen were not softened towards him at all, had not been induced to give him their regard and esteem, on account of his many "conscience" payments, and his manifold generousities; they could not forget or forgive his being a publican, and still held aloof from him as they had always done—still treated him with cold scorn, and refused to believe any good of him. *Because* he was a publican, he was still, in their eyes, a sinner—a sinner with whom it would be demeaning themselves to associate, and behind whose *appearance* of reformation there lurked, doubtless, no end of *secret* evil. It is quite possible, that none were more bitter against him, or more suspicious of him, than those to whom he had made some restitution for previous unjust exactions. Perhaps, in the course of time, had he persevered patiently in his well-doing, some might have begun to think, and to say, that he was not such a bad man after all, and even to confess them-

selves without shame, his friends; but social prejudice is a long while dying. Society is very slow to rehabilitate its outcasts. In a country town, whether in ancient Judæa or in modern England, nothing sticks more tenaciously than a bad name. *Once a publican, always a sinner.* Zacchæus, it is clear, had not won much way at present by his good deeds, into the good opinion of the inhabitants of Jericho. When we read how they all murmured at the Lord, saying, "He is gone to be guest with a man who is a sinner," we see the kind of excommunication under which he lay.

We can picture his *loneliness*; there he was, aspiring, aiming, struggling toward the right, without the least recognition or sympathy. As he went about, often, perhaps, with a great effort, to restore or to bestow, no eyes smiled on him their bright approval; no priest ever crossed the road to say, with genuine appreciation, and kindly interest in his face: "God bless you, Zacchæus; we give thanks to Him, always, for the grace granted you." *He was alone*—no countenance or help for *him*, in his desire to do right, and be right, from the righteous people around him; he had no place among them; they did not acknowledge him, would not own him. He was a flower that had chanced to spring up *outside* the garden gates, exposed to the dust and trampling of the highway, whom the gardeners never came to admire, or tend, and revive with water from the fountain; and over whom all the flowers *within* the garden, shook their heads severely, sighing that, for all his

perfume and colour, he was nothing at the bottom but a wretched weed.

We can understand, I think, the probable *effect* upon him of this kind of treatment; that it would be likely to make him somewhat hard and bitter, to lead him to be righteous, in rather a defiant way; unless, indeed, it made him desponding, fearful, and morbidly mistrustful of himself; but that in either case, the result would be, to hinder him from *becoming* as good as he was *doing*—to keep him down beneath the level of his deeds. What difficult, wearing work it would be, to persevere in the midst of coldness and contempt, with none believing in him, with all doubting, suspecting, shrinking from him. A man must need have supremely stern principles, and extraordinary elevation of feeling, to be capable of rising altogether above such circumstances, to escape being in the least impeded or marred by them. And with Zacchæus, it seems to me, there would be, under such circumstances, little or no *inward* lifting up and expansion—little or no redemption and purification of his *nature*. Driven by the preacher on the banks of the Jordan, to reform his life, to endeavour to behave justly and well; in the absence of all recognition and sympathy from the national representatives of Jehovah, and the religious world around him, his *heart* would remain, one can conceive, comparatively cold and lifeless; he would be wanting in vital, moral fluency and tenderness; would be deficient in that warm, restful, happy *spirit* of goodness, without which

there is no profound renewal of the man, and no real emancipation from the kingdom of sin.

And now, as he goes on thus,—striving in a hard, dreary, uncomfortable way, naturally craving the help of some kindly countenance and acknowledgment, and conscious perhaps the while, of something lacking in himself to make him perfect;—as he goes on thus, news comes to him that Christ is in the town.

There can be little doubt that he had heard of Him often before this—had heard a good deal of Him, perhaps, from fellow-publicans, so many of whom, convinced of their sins by the Baptist's ministry, had been attracted to Him, and had found comfort and strength in listening to His gracious words. We can imagine, that from some of these—his own subordinates in office, possibly—Zacchæus had received accounts of the wonderful sayings and doings, and withal, the wonderful condescension and compassion of Him who was said to be the Messiah, the sent of God; how He entertained freely all who came to Him, even the lowest and most debased, the very harlots, whom everybody else repudiated; how gently and encouragingly He addressed them, and what divine help He gave them, often, in their longings and blind efforts after better things. He was told, it may be, about the parables of "the Lost Sheep" and "the Prodigal Son," that were delivered in the hearing of numbers of the class; and of that other parable which followed, concerning "the Unjust Steward," and the way in which to make

to oneself "friends of the mammon of unrighteousness."

At all events, the tax-collector had heard enough, —*knew* enough, to interest *him* deeply in Christ ; and now that the latter is in the neighbourhood, and passing through the town, he must at least attempt to gain sight of Him. The scorn and severity of all the religious people whom he had hitherto known, had made him timid, perhaps, and afraid of encountering cold looks, if he presented himself. He did not dare, therefore, to ask for an interview, notwithstanding the reports that had been brought him of the Prophet's kindness ; but he would fain get a look, a good look at Him ; nay, he *must*, anyhow, by any means ; he cannot let the opportunity go of *seeing that face* ; to learn from it for himself, whether the sweet grace is there which he wants, which he could trust, which would embolden him to apply to its possessor for sympathy and help. What would it say to him ? Would he be able to read in it really, the charity and love which he had never yet read in any Pharisee's face ? Let him at once make proof of it ; and the next minute, he is aloft among the branches of the sycamore-tree, watching for the approach of the crowd, waiting with eager anxiety for the passing by. A moment more, and as he looks down, intently,—hungrily, the Lord Jesus looks straight up.

That upturned face, with the blending of an infinite sorrow and an infinite love in its still serene smile ; with the fulness of the heart of

God in its awfully pure, yet wistfully tender eyes! It was a face, surely, that might have *converted a soul*; we know indeed, that it *did*, one memorable night later on, when, at a glance from it, the blaspheming renegade, with the last oath of denial upon his tongue, "went out and wept bitterly." But the Lord Jesus looks straight up, stops, and, in the presence of all the townspeople, bids Zacchæus come down and entertain Him for the day in his house. You see, *this Holy One*, who is said to be Heaven's Anointed—the august Being whom John the Baptist foretold—*this Holy One*, in the midst of a multitude of religious Jews, pauses to notice *him*, is not ashamed to take him by the hand, deems him worthy of public recognition, speaks to him genially, kindly, seeks to have intercourse with him, chooses to become his guest.

And can you not perceive the *salvation* here? Can you not perceive what such treatment would naturally do for the Zacchæus whom we have been contemplating?—how it would shed into his soul new life, a new life of gratitude and love, of hope and confidence; how, in giving to him the sense of position,—the feeling of being acknowledged and accepted by Him who was greater than all—the assurance that the evil past, which had hitherto been a burden upon his shoulders and a shadow upon his path, was *not* to crush or keep him down, but that Jehovah, in His divine Messenger, was coming to him, and owning and embracing him, in spite of it;

—can you not perceive, how the treatment of Christ in giving to him this sense, this feeling and assurance, would inspire him with a new spirit, a sweeter, tenderer, freer, stronger spirit, and begin at once to make a new man of him? how it would raise him out of his old self into something larger and brighter, and cause, that while he might do no more, and no other, thereafter, than he had been doing already, he would do it thenceforth with *another heart*? Can you not picture him, erect, enlarged, and flowing in the ways of righteousness as he had never been?—no more struggling and toiling along them under the constraint of duty and fear; but finding in them his life and joy; not merely aiming and wrestling to *do* right, but elastic and rejoicing in the consciousness of *recovered rightness*. “I am loved and accepted notwithstanding all my former sinfulness, and my present imperfection; notwithstanding it, the great Lord comes to me, smiles upon me, and grants me His presence and sympathy, as though I were already a saint.”

This it was, which, in the midst of his hard striving to be good, gave Zacchæus salvation—salvation out of fear into freedom, out of weakness into strength, out of the spirit of a slave into the blessed and beautiful spirit of a son. And this is the salvation which the Redeemer always brings, in His revelation to those of every land and time who, under conviction of their sin and its sinfulness, are painfully endeavouring to work the works of God.

But now, *secondly*, as to the reason why salvation came to Zacchæus. “Forsomuch as he also is a son

of Abraham ;" *a son*, not, surely, in the sense of his having descended from Abraham—on which ground, if it might have been said that salvation was *offered* to him, it could not have been said that he had *obtained* salvation. No Jew was ever saved by Christ because he was a Jew. The utmost privilege which his nationality secured to him, was the privilege of being *first sought* by Christ. Hence the phrase, "a son of Abraham," must be understood here in an ethical sense,—as indicating the publican's relation to *the spirit* of the ancient patriarch, which was emphatically the spirit of faith. This was his distinguishing feature, that he believed in God and in the unseen ; his whole life having been governed and determined, not by what he saw, but by his firm persuasion concerning things that were invisible. It was his assurance, his conviction of these, that shaped his course and commanded his activities from first to last—that led him to forsake country and kindred, and made him a wanderer up and down Canaan until he died. And what says St. Paul : " Know ye therefore that they who are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. He is the father of the circumcision to those who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham which he had, being yet uncircumcised."

When, then, our Lord designated Zacchæus a "son of Abraham," he meant to convey that he was possessed in some degree of Abraham's faith ; and was not such the fact ? We have seen it exemplified in his acts of restitution and charity.

In the midst of his worldly greed and covetousness, while absorbed in labours, and often indulging in fraudulent practices, with a view to the accumulation of material wealth, he had been awakened to a vivid impression of unseen realities; had been roused to believe in the majesty of truth and the supremacy of goodness—in God, and in the claims of divine law; and had been constrained *thus*, to alter his way of life—to change his habits, restoring fourfold to those whom he had robbed, and, instead of grasping avariciously for his own secular enrichment, expending the half of his goods in dispensings to the poor. He was a believer; reformed and purified so far, by his faith, before ever he encountered Christ :—*as it is with many now-a-days.*

There is much religious faith in the world that is operative for much moral cleansing and beautifying, apart from all knowledge of *our* Redeemer. It is a blessed thing to have some faith in God and the invisible, even though we may not be able, at present, to discern the God in Christ. I cannot believe that there is an infinite wisdom and goodness ruling over all—that I am not a mere passing, perishing denizen of earth, but an immortal creature whose home is in eternity, and that righteousness is the everlasting law of the universe—without being the better for it. May it not be said, indeed, that the theism of Abraham produced, on the whole, a nobler man than is to be found to-day in many an evangelical Christian? Neverthe-

less, the effect of faith, real living faith, is measured and determined by *its object*. For example, it is more transforming and exalting to believe vitally in the self-giving, redeeming God whom the Gospel reveals, than in mere omnipotent rectitude and truth; so that all faith is not equally saving, is not equally restorative and elevating in its influence. Such a faith as St. Paul's, would tend to produce a diviner man, than the faith of such an one as Abraham.

But to return. Zacchæus was "a son of Abraham," in that, like him, he believed in and was swayed by the unseen. God, providence, righteousness, duty—these were realities to him, character-making, life-shaping realities, ever since he had heard John the Baptist's preaching.

Now I feel confident that Christ *meant* this, and that the publican of Jericho understood Him thus. I do not suppose that the Jews did, who were standing by and heard. *They*, in all probability, would take the word of our Saviour literally; and thus literally taken, it was a lesson, a rebuke to them. It served a purpose; it said: "You despise Zacchæus your neighbour, because he is one of a generally corrupt class, and one of those whom you have largely contributed to render corrupt, by the social ostracism to which you have condemned them; and you have forgotten that he is still a member of the House of Israel, equally with yourselves. What is it of which you are wont to boast? That you are the descendants of Abraham; and he, however

depraved he may be, has the same father. *That*, surely, ought to atone for much with you—ought, at least, to make you forbearing and friendly toward him, instead of bitterly scornful.” They forgot that even the worst and the lowest of the publicans were Abraham’s children; as we are prone sometimes to forget that the pauper, the criminal, and the outcast among us, are men—men whose nature Christ wears, and for whom He died. How often might Christian society be reminded concerning some who are coldly neglected, superciliously looked down upon, or repudiated,—*These also* are Christ’s.

But while the spectators on this occasion, saw no more in our Lord’s asseveration than an allusion to the Abrahamic descent of Zacchæus, Zacchæus himself, you may be sure, saw deeper. He who had heard the voice from the wilderness crying, “Think not to say within yourselves we have Abraham to our father,” until it stirred in him convictions of sin, and pains of repentance—he would have learnt to feel, that to be a Jew, was not enough to ensure one’s participation in the blessings of the kingdom of God; that there must be something more than that; and would *he*, think you, understand the gracious Prophet to mean that salvation had come to him *because* he was a Jew? Nay, he had gained some little sense and feeling of that which is spiritual; and he therefore would see a spiritual meaning in the word, in which others saw nothing beyond the letter. Here was a word spoken by Christ; and the people and the publican

found in it, severally, according to what they severally brought to it; the one took possession of their part, and the other of his, each according to the preparation of heart that was in them. So it is that the same Divine word is always divided. What it shall say to any, at any time, will be determined by what they are. Is it not true, indeed, of all weighty words that are uttered, that we can never pronounce with certainty, upon what they shall exactly convey, but that, as the nutritiveness of any article of food is fixed and regulated by the individual organism into which it passes, so is the significance of these. To the multitude at the door, the phrase "a son of Abraham," may have stood only for natural descent from Abraham, but to the spiritually-awakened tax-gatherer it expressed, one cannot doubt, the deeper idea which the Lord Himself intended to express—the idea, viz. of participation in the *faith* of Abraham.

And this faith in the man, was the *reason* why the visit of Christ became to him salvation. We know that it was so. Many received from the advent of the Divine Son no blessing at all; sensual and world-grovvelling men, who lived only in outward religious forms and ceremonies, in slavish bondage to the material and the visible, whose motives and inspirations were all derived exclusively from the circle of the seen,—to *these* there came with Him no gift of inward rest and healing, no elevation into strengthening peace and joy; for all that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, such as these remained unsaved; but wherever the souls of men

had been quickened into something of spiritual awe and fear, and were being burdened at all with the feeling of God, and the solemnities of the invisible world; *there* His coming gave salvation. Yes, it was just because Zacchæus had begun to believe,—had begun to tremble and struggle, under the power of faith,—that the presence of the Lord in Jericho this day, was made to him a saving presence.

The fulness of Christ, cannot flow into the self-contented or world-bound heart. There must be some breaking-up of its stagnant detention and composure in self and sin, some revelation to it, and bearing down upon it of the heavenly, before He can become its Redeemer, and thrill it with the joy of conscious life in Him; which was what He meant when He said, "No man can come to Me except the Father, who hath sent Me, draw him."

And let us be sure, brethren, from the case of the Judæan publican, that there is no sincere, earnest faith anywhere, whatever ignorance and mistakes there may be at present in connection with it, or however far it may be at present from realising the true God, to which, sooner or later, the same blessing shall not come. Let us be sure, that to everyone, who, under some impression of the invisible and the infinite, is striving to lift up and cleanse himself, although it be by inadequate and misleading means,—that to every such one, sooner or later, Christ will be revealed for his perfecting. A little faith, faithfully cherished and

followed, is the pledge and prophecy of all blessing—even of “all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” Abraham may die without seeing His day, but, having died in faith, *he has seen it since*, and it has made him glad. And think you, that He who went down of old to Jericho, to reveal Himself for the saving of Zacchæus *because* he was “a son of Abraham,” will fail to reveal Himself somewhere, at some time, for eternal life, to *all* faith, amidst whatever darkness and error it may now be throbbing?







## THE NEW BIRTH.

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JOHN iii. 3—5.

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto Him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

**Y**OU know to whom Christ spoke these words, and the circumstances under which they were spoken. Nicodemus—a man of rank, a member of the highest Court of Judicature among the Jews—had been thinking, of course, in common with the rest of his countrymen, a good deal about the expected Messiah, whose advent was generally supposed to be imminent. The air was full of anticipation. People were prepared to learn that the long-promised Prince was on the point of showing Himself; the dispensation of the fulness of times, they felt sure, had almost arrived.

In the midst of these diffused presentiments, Christ came to Jerusalem, where numbers had met with Him, hearing His wayside sermons, and arrested by the wonders which they saw

Him perform; while, to those who had not yet *witnessed* for themselves, strange reports concerning Him, found their way—stories of His surpassing power and wisdom in discourse, of His impressive bearing, and His remarkable works. We may be certain that venerable magistrates and ecclesiastics, in session at the council-chamber, and in conversation at the dinner-table, talked much about Him—relating to each other what they had heard, and exchanging thoughts and opinions on the matter. And some of them, although there were grave objections to the notion, on account of His mean birth, and squalid surroundings—some of them were inclined to conclude, not that He was actually the Messiah, but at least an inspired forerunner, sent from above to announce His approach, and to give information with respect to Him; as He Himself appeared to assert in His constantly-reiterated cry, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Very many, indeed, strenuously opposed the idea, and tried to laugh it down. Nevertheless, in the minds of a few, it became gradually fixed—among whom was Nicodemus, who resolved to obtain, if possible, further satisfaction for himself, through a personal interview; and under cover of night, for fear of incurring the ridicule of his associates, at length called on Christ at the house where He lodged, introducing himself with the frank avowal, that he and some others had been led to believe, in consequence of His many great miracles,

that He must be a teacher from God, divinely commissioned and instructed concerning the Messianic reign, and that he was now applying to Him as such. It was in reply to this confession of His secret visitor, that our Lord spoke the words we have just read.

Let us attempt to understand, *first*, what they were meant to express to the Hebrew inquirer. I have said that the Jews were united in looking forward to a speedy revelation of the Messiah, in order to the establishment of His kingdom. From their earliest years they had been taught to dwell upon His name, and expect His coming. The sacred oracles of the nation were filled with glowing predictions of Him; and, of late, an universal impression had prevailed that the fulfilment of these ancient prophecies could not be long delayed. The anticipation of His appearing to found an everlasting dominion, that should not pass away, was the one cherished dream of the people—their solace in suffering, and their escape from the dulness of common hours. And what ideas had they formed with regard to Him? From all we can gather, the majority were imagining a supernaturally endowed warrior-prince, who, by His irresistible power, would restore the country to its old material strength and splendour, emancipating it from the hated Roman yoke, and giving it rule and sway over the heathen.

There were a few, like the venerable Simeon and others, who, recognising with grief the

terrible corruption of the times, and convinced that no material greatness could be realised for Israel, until they were purged, had learned to look forward to one, whose mission it would be to save them from their sins—to bless them in turning away every one of them from his iniquity; and who felt that such *must* be the character in which the *true* Messiah, whenever He came, would present Himself. They believed, as a few do in our own day,—when the tendency is to seek for the golden age in mere legislative enactments, or reformed institutions,—that a country cannot be made glorious, and free, by these means, while its citizens are wanting in honour and virtue—in manliness and moral culture; that what we want chiefly, and before all, is not something done for us, in the shape of ameliorated outward conditions, or new forms of government, but individual education in grace and righteousness; that each should be learning to acquire good habits, to purify and control himself, and to feel and live nobly. The multitude, however, are always trusting in some particular political measure, or some particular social change, to bring about the millennium of national well-being and blessedness—are always trusting *thus*, to the neglect of self-reformation and self-discipline, as did the multitude among the Jews, who, abiding in their sins, counted on a revolution of circumstances to make them a great people again, and contemplated a Messiah who should come with sword and spear to exalt the land. The picture in their

minds, was a royal son of David, armed, crowned, and conquering—smiting the heathen, for them, hip and thigh, and enriching them with the spoils of their victories.

Now, we can understand that the constant indulgence of such a dream, as their idea of the highest and the best, as their conception of what the Anointed of God would be and do, must have operated to carnalise—to render them more and more vulgar and coarse in soul; that, having grown up to brood over nothing but images of sensuous splendour, physical might, and military success, in connection with their ideal man and time, they would have lost out of them, in a large degree, the power of apprehending, and entering into the glory of the spiritual—the faculty of recognising and appreciating it. “As one thinketh in his heart, so is he.” You cannot habitually *think* mean things without *becoming* mean, and incapable, at last, of discerning the high. You cannot be led to enshrine in the mental temple a *low* ideal, without becoming *lowered* to its quality, and incapable, at last, of perceiving aught above it.

And the Jews of Christ’s day had sunk to be mean and low. Years of looking and longing for a mere worldly deliverance—a mere worldly triumph—had subdued them to worldliness, and destroyed or impaired their spiritual sensibility; the finer eyes of the soul were eaten away within them. And now here, at length, stood the veritable Messiah in their midst, arrived, at length, to set up His kingdom; but, instead of being the sub-

stance of their vision—the vision which they had conjured up and cherished—His beauty was the beauty of “truth and grace,” His reign the reign of righteousness. He had appeared, notwithstanding weapons of war, but with “the glory of the Only-begotten of the Father,”—not to win political emancipation for Israel, but to seek her salvation from her sins. What could follow, but that the people were unable to comprehend that *this* was He? “This He!” they said; “a mere benevolent and saintly man, inveighing against iniquity, and inculcating purity and love, discoursing of the Father in heaven, and performing miracles of healing upon a few sick folk. There is no redeeming King here, that we can descry, for a redeeming King implies some pomp and purple—an army and a crown; and since these are wanting, no Messiah is visible to us.” Having, by prolonged communion with their carnal idea, deadened their spiritual susceptibility, they were blind to the royalty of Divine *character* and Divine *truth*, and could not be made to understand it. Like many now-a-days, whose degradation and misery it is, that while storing pebbles for pearls, and purchasing tinsel for fine gold, the majesty of true worth is hidden from them.

When, then, Nicodemus—who, although perceiving Christ to be a teacher from above, could not perceive in the teacher the King—when Nicodemus came to Him for information concerning the Messianic reign, was it not in reference to the incapacity of his worldliness, and

the worldliness of his countrymen, that our Lord said, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God?" As though He had said: "You desire Me to tell you something about it; but how can I, when, in consequence of your radically earthly mind, the whole thing is invisible to you? In your present moral state you are unable to take in the idea of it—are unable to grasp and feel it; and never will be, unless you become inwardly, altogether another creature. You must begin to *be* and *live* afresh, from a new starting-point, on a new level of sentiment and conviction, under the influence of a new ruling principle; your animating impulse must be changed—you must be born again."

Now, Nicodemus was not foolish enough, or frivolous enough, to suppose that language—obviously figurative—was intended to be taken literally. The peculiar phraseology employed by Christ, was not at all strange, or unfamiliar, to him. It had been customary with the Jews, when a Gentile gave up his old heathen creed, and embraced the creed of Judaism, to designate the conversion he underwent, "a new birth." His natural impression, therefore, would be, that he was required, as a condition of receiving instruction, to relinquish certain views which he had hitherto entertained, to submit to a revolution in his Messianic sentiments and ideas; and he meets the demand with an exclamation at the difficulty, the extreme difficulty, of such transition in the case of an old man like himself, whose opinions were for

the most part too fixed to admit of easy surrender; in reply to which objection, it is further explained to him, in terms which a Jew of the time could not fail to understand, that the change necessary for him, was not *merely* a change of mental view, but a change of moral heart; since, to be "born of water and of the Spirit" would unquestionably mean for him—as for any of his serious contemporaries—an inward cleansing of repentance, in allusion to the baptism of John, together with an inward experience of Divine influence as the source and impulse of that repentance; and without such profound renewal, engendered by the breath of the Holy One, and issuing in purification of character and life, he is told, that it would be impossible for him, not only to perceive the reality, but to touch the circle, of the Messianic kingdom; that, in order to have any part or lot in it, he must, from his innermost being, start afresh—must be spiritually born again.

And now, *secondly*, what teaching is there here for us? How far, and in what sense, are we required to undergo the inward *re-creation* of which Christ spoke to the Jerusalem Pharisee? If to the latter, as a representative of men, whose earthy tendencies in the first instance had exhaled for them an earthy ideal, the continual contemplation of which had served to deepen and aggravate their earthiness, until, for the discrimination and appreciation of the spiritual, little or no capacity was left in them—if to such an one it was solemnly declared that except a man were born again—not

simply into new views, or new manners, but into a new soul principle, God-begotten and character-begetting—he could not share in the kingdom which the Divine Son had come to reveal and build up; does the same thing apply to us? Must *we* suffer the kind of conversion which Nicodemus, and his carnalised friends, were told that *they* must experience? For the kingdom of the Messiah that was at hand, and that having come, has lived through the ages, has not ceased to exist; neither has it ceased to be true, that blessed are all they who enter in.

Well, let us try to understand the *terms*, to penetrate the *reality* which they enfold. “The kingdom of God,” in the ears of the Jewish Doctor, was, of course, the Messianic kingdom, of which he had the ordinary Jewish conceptions; and to enter it, for him, would be to participate in the national repose and prosperity, the national elevation and splendour, which it was expected to bring. He thought that he must be born again to see and participate in *that*; but Christ, as we know, meant something very different. “The kingdom of God” is, simply, *the reign of God*; and to enter His kingdom, therefore, is to become *subject to Him*. But, then, since His reign is from everlasting to everlasting—an universal reign, from beneath which nothing is excluded, under which, all things are included; and since none ever were, or ever can be, other than subject to it—consciously or unconsciously, with or without their will;—the kingdom of God, which began to be established and

developed in Christ, and within which we *may*, or may *not*, be found, must have a deeper, inwarder significance. And what can it signify, but the reign of the righteous and merciful God over the individual affections and will?

They, then, are *in* the kingdom, who have come to be thus ruled and governed,—whom He is supremely influencing—whose crescent moral shape, and pervading moral tone and direction, are determined by His constraint. To enter into that Divine kingdom which Christ was manifested to lay deep and set up, is to begin to find our highest law, our strongest motive, our central inspiration, in that glorious God-Father, the holy and forgiving One, whom Christ reveals; and the affirmation of the latter is, that such a state of things involves a new birth,—not a mere modification of original ground, but a fresh foundation—not a mere alteration of form, but a change of spirit;—that there is no such surrender and subjection, without being born again.

And let me ask, whether we are not ready to acknowledge at once the truth of this in relation to men generally, to-day. Look at those around you who are manifestly *not* in the kingdom, who cannot be said to be thinking, feeling, choosing, acting, growing, and unfolding *out of God*, as their fundamental reason and impulse. Is it not obvious, that for them to become so, would not only constitute a great change, but would necessitate an antecedent great change, in order to bring it about? Or, suppose that *you*

are not in the kingdom—that whatever you may be that is good, and gracious, and fair, you are not, supremely, a God-governed, God-influenced man, at the root of whose vital character, and voluntary life, is the Father revealed in Christ—then, looking at yourself, are you not sensible that from the level and along the line of your present inmost self—the inmost self that underlies and shapes you,—you would never attain to *that*; that for you to become *that*, would involve the need of a kind of re-creation of your inmost self?

When the Lord Jesus says of those whose affections and wills are not yielded to God, that they never will be, unless they are born again, do we not recognise that it is true? Are we not conscious of a ruling mind and spirit that is opposed to such yielding, and which, in order to it, would have to be melted into another mind and spirit—that to be found *living* in God, we should have to be *quickened into* God—that some revolution must take place in our interior bent and leaning?

But, then, looking around us; there are men who are being already more or less constrained by Him, and who have been more or less constrained thus, from their childhood. From as far back as they can well remember, they have grown up in a tender awe and worshipping love of the God whom Christ declares; they can hardly recall a time when, in some degree, He did not inspire and command them. His influence, of course, was comparatively fluctuating and feeble in their earliest years, while as yet He was only imper-

fectly apprehended ; but it has increased with their increase of days, as they have come to know and discern Him more fully.

Many, I believe, in our Christian families, have risen into manhood and womanhood, *needing* to be born again, just because they were never privileged to see the true God, were taught from the first another than the true God,—One who repelled them, and could not but repel them,—One whom it was impossible for them to trust and surrender to ; otherwise, probably, they would have yielded themselves, softly and fluently, as spring buds to the touch of the sun, the moment of whose opening is not observed, so gentle and gradual is it ; for the *true* God is no less winsome and attractive to the heart of children than Christ, His Revealer, would seem to have been, when He was on earth.

Does not Christendom contain men to-day, who almost shudder at the recollection of the face—the hard, cruel, ignoble face—that was shown to them as the face of the Lord, in their innocent boyhood—a face that they tried to admire and love, and could not ; and who sadly wish that He whom they see *now*, when, alas ! the beautiful susceptibility may be well nigh gone, and the world may be too much with them—had only been revealed to them when they were young ; who cannot help feeling that, had they but known Him *then*, they might have been better men than they are, might not have been needing now to be born again in order to enter His king-

dom? Yet, since His quickening Spirit is abroad in all the earth, why should they not, if with a mighty effort, lay themselves open to its breath, and let it breathe within them "the new man which is created after God," and for Him.

Some there are—happy souls!—who have been born into the presence of the true God from their birth, and, having grown up with Him in the sweet enclosure of a truly Christian home, have been always constrained by Him; or else passed under His constraint, out of self-will, so early, while yet the nature had acquired no fixed downward bent, no hard, rigid inclination against Him, that the change was almost too mild and gently progressive to be described as a new birth. But there are multitudes with whom it is not thus—who have become men and women without receiving Him to reign over them—who are living, and have lived for years, centred in unfilial independence and alienation, and who must need be born again to enter into His kingdom.

Well, Christ is the divine organ for the production of this inward change; He came, manifesting in Himself "Him that is true," the holy and merciful Father—the all-righteous and all-forgiving One—that at the sight of Him, it might be effected in the souls of men; and we preach and expound Him still for this end. He began His earthly ministry with the cry, "The kingdom of heaven *is at hand*," because He knew, and was conscious, that His revelation of God would prevail to draw to Him; that some of all classes and

ranks would be renewed and converted by it to fall in under the heavenly reign, as, indeed, when, He was once lifted up from the earth, it came to pass, and is still coming to pass. Thus, to see and believe Christ, "the brightness of the Father's glory," is to be born again. "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believed on His name." "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." Give your mind, then, and open your heart, to Him. You who feel the want of a regenerating *influence*, to submit and subject you to the infinite will, you cannot re-create yourselves, cannot force yourselves up into a new spirit, but you *can* turn aside to contemplate Christ; you *can* look for, and search out, and reach after, the divine shining in Him in whom God presents Himself to quicken us into the life of faith and love.

Here is the exciting force, and he, who, resolutely coming out of himself, and standing and gazing until he finds and experiences it there,—as such an one shall do;—for as surely as the summer landscape smites and fills the opening eye, so surely does the breath of the Lord sweep down upon the heart that goes out after Him—*he*, with whatever difficulty and travail, in consequence of resisting elements within him, which the years have been accumulating—*he* will be "born of water and of the Spirit," for entrance into the kingdom of God.

You have had the revelation of Christ clear to

you for many a day, yet, in spite of it, you are as far, apparently, from the new birth into faith and love, as ever ; yet, nevertheless, how often has the revelation, lying powerless and ineffectual, become, *on a sudden*, in connection with some impressive circumstance, or some tenderer and more serious mood than usual, a *swiftly*-transforming power ; and why should it not become so in your case now ? Will you crave and pray that it may ? Have you ever sought to open and expose your soul to it, as you might have done ? Will you seek earnestly at this time, if, peradventure, the old *unfelt* truth, "in the face of Jesus Christ," shall not presently begin to *pierce* you with the Holy Ghost and fire ?







## OUR ROBE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

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ISAIAH lxi. 10, 11.

"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God ; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth ; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations."

"**T**HE robe of righteousness" is a familiar phrase with Evangelical Christians. We have been accustomed to hear it preached, prayed, and sung from our childhood. Adopted, undoubtedly, from the passage just read, it is used to denote that righteousness of the Lord Jesus which they who believe in Him are supposed to have attributed to them by God, so that their actual personal imperfections and defects disappear before Him, like some foul or ugly object beneath the overspreading of a fair, white mantle ; and He is enabled to accept them for what they are not—to regard and deal with them as sinless.

This is the doctrine. We, at our best, are faulty and deformed, and, in such a condition,

cannot be otherwise than vexatious and offensive, painful and displeasing, to the Holy Father; hence, to render it possible for Him to entertain and embrace us, to render us fit for His presence, He graciously transfers to us, in idea, the goodness of His perfect Son, graciously assumes to behold it investing us, and thus discerns no longer our faults and deformities. The robe of righteousness, says the doctrine, in which we rejoice, is that imputation to us, in the Almighty mind, of Christ's worth and virtue, without which we—always evil-tainted, evil-scarred creatures—could not stand before Him; by which he blots out to His eye our real impurity, and can welcome and delight in us as stainless souls—stainless souls who alone, are bearable to His infinite holiness. Such is the sentiment of the well-known hymn of Count Zinzendorf, translated by John Wesley :—

“Jesus, Thy robe of righteousness  
My beauty is, my glorious dress;  
'Mid flaming worlds in this arrayed,  
With joy shall I lift up my head.”

And, again, in the hymn of Philip Doddridge—

“This spotless robe which He hath wrought,  
Shall deck us all around;  
Nor by the piercing eye of God  
One blemish shall be found.”

Now here is, first, *an assumption*—the false and cruel assumption, that the great Father, while waiting the gradual accomplishment of our complete purification from sin, requires to have our

existing sinfulness hidden from Him, requires to have it veiled and concealed; that He must not be revolted or disturbed by the spectacle; that we must be made, somehow, nay, anyhow, at least *to look* clean to Him, whatever our actual uncleanness may be; that He is not capable of enduring the sight of His children as they are, but needs that a mask shall be worn by them—a pretty, delicately-fashioned mask—to smile between Him and their unseemliness. . . Poor children! worse off than any of ours, my friends. If I had a son, or a daughter, returning to me, humble and penitent, after a period of wandering in bad ways, but marred for awhile through their misconduct by some sad disfigurement, would I need that they should cover it carefully before coming nigh me; would I be obliged to warn them from my door until I had devised a means of putting it out of view; would I declare myself incapable of falling upon their neck and kissing them, as they stood and wept, saying, “Father, we have sinned,” unless I could manage first to *avoid seeing* the disfigurement; would I cry, “Stop till I have brought a cloak to throw over those horribly maimed limbs, till I have purchased a mask to fix upon those seamed features”? Would I?—would you? And can it be that the dear God will only kiss us when we sink at His feet repentant, but uncomely, through a robe flung round us by Christ to *hide* our disagreeableness, and make us *seem* finer than we are? Can it be that the infinite Love to whom “belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against

Him," must need have us dressed up and painted over with sweet colours, not our own, before we are taken to His arms?

Yet, stay; was there not a "best robe" with which the father of the prodigal son hastened to clothe him on his return in stained, torn raiment, from the far country? Yes, surely there was; but I never gathered from the narrative that it was put on over his untidy rags to prevent their being seen by the father; and one thing is certain, viz. that the latter did not call for it to enable Him to fold the poor shabby lad to His breast, for He had done that already—had fallen upon his neck, and kissed him, *just as he was*. No, my brothers, God does not want to shut out from His view what we are, that is distorted or deficient, beneath the imputation to us of Another's goodness, in order to receive us. It is a cruel and dishonouring assumption to intimate that He does.

Nay, more, is it conceivable of Him that He should ever be *content* to be blind to that which *is*, that He should ever *endure* to have any reality disguised to Him? Can you imagine Him satisfied to know His children other than they *are*? Do you not feel, that were it possible for one to offer to provide a veil for their ugliness, so that it might not distress or offend Him, do you not feel that He would reject the offer, saying—however sadly—"No, bad as the sight may be, I must need look upon it; I can have nothing concealed from Me; let them come to Me, and dwell with Me, with all their unhappy deformity naked before

Me. Away with your robe from off them, and let Me forgive them, and cherish them, and devote Myself to them, *in full view* of their darkest and worst!" Are you not seriously conscious that it is most *unlike* Him, most contradictory of His character and principles, to begin by covering up that which is repulsive to Him, by overlaying the disorder and disease that He means to cure, with a show of health and soundness—He whose constant rule it is, to work from within towards the surface, and who declares Himself always dissatisfied with a mere gracious appearance, beneath which corruption festers?

But of what are we talking? *Can* aught be hidden from Him, the All-seeing One, or be made to seem to Him for a moment, other than it is? *Can* He, the infinitely true, indulge in empty and delusive fancies concerning us, or pretend to Himself that we are beautified in another's righteousness—that another's righteousness is laid upon us to the overflow of our defect? Impossible! for ever impossible; to His eye we must be visible, we can *only* be visible eternally, as we are; nor can He make believe to transfer to us the untransferable.

And now let us turn to the prophet, whose noble figure has been so miserably perverted, so falsely applied, and observe how different is his idea of the robe of which he speaks. At the first glance, indeed, his words may be thought to contain a justification of the Evangelical notion. "The Lord hath covered me," he says, "as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a

bride adorneth herself with her jewels;" which *seems* to imply, certainly, a putting on from without, and nothing more; yet, if we consider, the writer may well have discerned in the lavish decoration of themselves on the part of the bridegroom and the bride, something more than that, not a mere imposition, but an expression, the natural expression, of what was within. It was thus, he may have reflected—it was thus, that their love, and hope, and joy, on the marriage morning, were uttered, and shone forth upon them—thus, that they told out the happy feelings that danced and sparkled in their breasts. Their ornaments and jewels, what were they, or, at least, what ought they to be, but the sign and breaking out, of the gladness of the two hearts in anticipation of their union?

But then, as if apprehensive of mistakes—as if anxious to guard against the conclusion, that the robe of which he sang was only flung over him from without, the Prophet hastens on to a further and more complete illustration, adding, "For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so will the Lord cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations;" as though he had said; while, in the self-adorning of the bridegroom and the bride on their wedding-day, I find an image of the grace with which my Lord clothes me, and of the joy that belongs to it, yet this fails to represent the whole of the matter—fails, indeed, to represent the profoundest and most important part of it, viz., the *modus operandi*

—the way in which my clothing is effected. *That* is adumbrated, in the world of material nature, in the vernal decking of the bare, brown fields, and the winter-stripped pleasure-grounds. There, you may see and understand, *how* the Lord robes me with righteousness; behold, the mantle, the rich variegated mantle, that forms gradually over the hitherto naked landscape, creeping up the slopes, rippling along the plains, fringing the edge of the precipice, swathing mountain and meadow in fresh folds of juicy green—embroidering the wilderness with flowers. What is it, and whence comes it? Is it not just *a growth from within*—an efflux upon the surface, of life that throbs below—a bursting through and running over of the earth's own germ-charged bosom? And God's robe of righteousness is the forthflowing upon me, of His hidden movement and working in my soul—not a robe *laid on*, but a robe *coming out*—not a robe assumed, but a robe issuing; it is the holy character, and the holy living, that are begotten of His Divine inbreathing.

Such, was evidently the thought of Isaiah, when he sang of the robe with which the Lord had covered him: he meant by it, the righteousness, which, instead of a mere semblance or appearance, still less a mere feigned conveyance to him on the part of his Maker, was a real, vital, personal righteousness, an unfolding upon him from his Maker's gracious sowing within. And that was why he rejoiced in it; because it was *not* a mere outward manufacture—*not* a

mere dead pretence, flapping about him—*not* a mere figment, which Heaven had agreed to accept for substance; but *a growth*, an actual, beautiful growth, from Divine seeds and rootings in the soul, “Even as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth that which is sown in it to spring forth.” Nor is there any other righteousness worth rejoicing in, for, as St. Paul the Apostle says, “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His,” and “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God;” while, as St. John the Apostle says, “He that *doeth* righteousness *is* righteous,” and “Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.”

The robe of Isaiah was *God's* robe,—the robe with which God had arrayed him,—because God had wrought it within him, because it was the outcome of God's inspiration. He *is* “the Lord our righteousness,” the source and secret of all virtue, *by imbuing us with the spirit of sonship*. “As many as received Christ, to them gave He power to become the sons of God.” He came to sow in us the seed of righteousness, even His own filial liberty, and peace, and confidence; He “dwells in our hearts by faith.” And *so* we begin, and go on, to be filled “unto all the fulness of God.”

But, then, it may be asked, do not the Scriptures speak of an “imputed” righteousness; and what do they mean by that, if the only righteousness which we have from above, is a real growth of righteousness in us out of a divinely-engendered spirit?

Well, this divinely-engendered spirit is *faith*—filial trust and surrender : “ We wait for the hope of righteousness through faith ;” “ Ye are the children of God by faith ;” “ He that believeth, the works that I do, shall he do also ;” “ With the heart man believeth unto righteousness ;” “ The righteousness of God, which is by the faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe.” The sweet, happy, inspiring, filial rest in the great Father, of which Christ is at once the most perfect example, and the most powerful inducer,—*such* is the spirit, the germinal spirit of righteousness.

Now, we are told that the patriarch Abraham—even without the exemplification and inducement that have been brought to us in Christ the Saviour, (so quick and rich was his Divine susceptibility)—we are told, that “ he believed God, being strong in faith ;” and that his faith was “ imputed to him for righteousness ;” from whence, the Apostle proceeds to teach, that in the same way, to those who now believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord, *their* faith is imputed for righteousness. There you have the Scripture statement concerning the imputation of righteousness. It is not said, you observe, that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us as if it were ours, but that our own faith is imputed to us for righteousness, which is a very different thing. In other words, that when constrained and converted by the manifestation of God in the flesh—by the revelation of God in Christ—to trust

Him, to cast myself confidently, and rejoicingly, upon His love, as a yearning, happy child upon his father—that *then* He imputes to me the possession of righteousness.

But is not this, some may ask, equally an unreality with that which has been condemned, viz. the imputation to a sinful creature of another's grace and goodness? No; the difference between the two, is equal to the difference between imputing one man's intellect to another, and manhood to the child of either; or between imputing animal life to a tree, and masses of foliage to its budding boughs; for while there can be no such thing as a man's enduement with his neighbour's intellect, or a tree partaking of animal life; in the child the man lies rudimentally, and foliage rudimentally, in the buds of spring; and so, while it is impossible for Christ's goodness to be conveyed to me—to be transferred from Him to me—the spirit of His faith, which He quickens in me, *is* the germ and root of goodness, after the likeness of His own. Hence, God's imputation of it to me for righteousness, on the birth of faith within me, is a most profoundly real thing—there is no fancy or fiction, no make-believe or pretence, about it; it is but His recognition of the new character, and conduct, which the spirit of faith enfolds and promises to produce; He reckons it *for* righteousness, and accepts it *as* righteousness, in the same way in which I reckon for vines, and accept as vines, these brown, bare twigs, because they are the living stocks out of which the vine will certainly

grow; in the same way in which I reckon for morning, and accept as morning, yonder thin pale streak of light, just visible on the eastern horizon, because it is the morning begun, and carries in it the earnest of a brightness that will brighten unto noon.

"Come into my garden of roses," I cry; and where are the roses that cannot be seen or smelt? Be patient—here they are, born, and beginning to be—although as yet not obvious—in these knots of green. "Behold," cries God, "the righteousness that I create and embrace." And where is it, with its "beauty as the olive-tree, and its smell as Lebanon"? Where is it, with its noble works and ways, with its gracious doing and suffering? Listen, it has begun to breathe *here*, in the sob—the sad, yet happy, sob of this long prodigal soul, "Let me arise, and go to my Father." Wait, and you shall see.

Brethren, the only robe of righteousness with which God clothes men, or *can* clothe them, is that which grows up over them, from the Divine Spirit divinely breathed within them, "as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth." And the Divine Spirit, out of which this robe is made, and will be ever making, is *the spirit of sonship*—the spirit of loyal, loving trust in God—which as often as He finds rising into birth, He rejoices over with exceeding joy, as a father over his child that was lost; and, knowing its potentiality, imputes it for righteousness.





## CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS.

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I JOHN I. 9.

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

**T**HE forgiveness of God, the Father of men, may be said to lie at the foundation of human existence, and, in the fact of human existence, to be perpetually signified. The generations are its witness. We ourselves manifest it, simply by reason that we *are*, and are still *repeated*.

Who made us? According to your belief and mine, we owe our being to a Power of infinite goodness and love, whose offspring we are; and the only possible motive and design of such a Power in begetting us, would be, that He might train us toward the best and highest of which we are capable; might develop us toward His idea of the form into which sons and daughters of the Lord should round and orb. Assuming Him, and our derivation from Him, you can scarcely conceive of any other object; but it follows, therefore, that His forgiveness of our sins is *involved* in the very fact that we continue to be born, that the world of humanity continues to revolve; unless, indeed, the Eternal Spirit, with

whom is "no variableness," has relinquished or changed His purpose ; since alone by determining to pardon whatever unworthiness might appear upon us, whatever wrongness might come forth in us, and by carrying out the practice from the beginning to the end—thus alone, could the purpose with regard to us be prosecuted and maintained.

If I have been made, to be placed under tuition, and put to school, with a view to my perfecting,—which must have been the case, if He who made me is the Father, the righteous and gracious Father,—*then*, in the sense of not suffering rejection for my offences, or lying beneath doom for them, but having still around me, in spite of them, the warm arms of paternal interest and concern, *then* am I always forgiven. It is the condition in which I live, the state in which I am nourished and brought up. The Divine pardon is not something to be waited for or striven after, a blessing dependent upon something that must precede it ; it has not to be created by us, or by anybody else for us, through exercise of faith or offer of atonement ; but it *is* already, and *has been* all along, original and fundamental in the relations of God with man ; and one of the uses and aims of Christ is to make known and certify, by revealing the Father, what, but for His revelation, sin-confused natures would never have guessed—having, indeed, surmised quite the contrary—and what, even *with* His revelation, they yet find it hard to entertain and rest in. "By this man is preached unto us the forgiveness of sins,"

But how, now, shall we explain the apparent contradiction of the text, in which confession is represented as procuring forgiveness, as the act that we have to perform in order to obtain it? There are two replies: *first*, no forgiveness, it is obvious, however real, can be complete—complete, either, in respect of the person who grants it, or in respect of the person to whom it is granted—*until* the latter has been brought to see and feel the sinfulness of his sin, and to repent of it. You may freely forgive an offence that has been committed against you, cherishing no resentment against the offender, nursing no thought of vengeance, still wishing him well, still ready to show him kindness, nay, still going on to seek his good—to work and sacrifice for his welfare as before, even although he may exhibit no sense of the wrong he has done, no grief or regret for it, and may refrain from acknowledging it and asking your pardon. But you cannot flow towards him, cannot restore him to his old place in your heart, or resume your old sweet relations with him, as you are able to do when once he begins to soften into contrition, and discovers a spirit shrinking away with revulsion from the badness of his conduct, and responsive to your own in its estimate of it. *Then*, how much more tender, and warm, and full your forgiveness becomes. Then, how you can fall upon his neck and love him again. You forgave him before, but now, and now only, are you reconciled to him. It could not be otherwise. Having your feeling

about his sin, you could not possibly stream to him and blend with him, while he felt nothing of its shame and evil. Even so with God's pardon. There is a perfecting of it, *in Him*, which waits, and must need wait, for the confession of the transgressor.

And then, in respect of the person to whom it is granted. No forgiveness, it is equally clear, can be complete until *penitence* has awakened within him; because, without such awaking, it does not reach or touch him—is not really possessed by him. He enjoys no reception of it, no entering into the comfort and blessedness of it. It is still altogether outside him, like nutritive elements in the stomach, which some derangement or vitiation of the organ, prevents from penetrating and nourishing the system. What is it to one who has wronged you, that you forgive him, so long as he remains blind to his culpability, and undisturbed, and untroubled, by the iniquity of his behaviour? It does not pass upon him, his soul has not the least inheritance in it. Only when his eyes are open to perceive the meanness, or the wickedness, of which he has been guilty, and a rush of remorse and repentance fills his soul—*only then* can he be said to receive the pardon which you have been bestowing upon him all along—*only then* is he forgiven, whom you had forgiven from the beginning. Then the merciful kindness you had wafted toward him, comes to him, and is realised, and rejoiced in, as it could not be while he stood impenitent. Even so,

"if we say that we have no sin, the truth"—the reality of the Divine forgiveness—"is not in us;" but "if we confess our sins, He who is faithful and just forgives us our sins;" that is, by the confession of them, and alone by the confession of them, we enter into conscious possession of His forgiveness.

The Greek word rendered "confess," is suggestive here; it means, primarily, to speak the same thing to another, and thus to coincide and agree with another, and from thence, to concede what he lays down, to admit it, to confess that it is so. Now, truly to confess our sins, is to come into accord with the mind of God about them. It is to be at one with Him in our judgment of them, in our thought and feeling of their wrongness; and thus it is that we apprehend, and are made consciously and happily recipient of, His pardoning mercy. By rising into something of correspondence and conformity with His views of sin, by being stirred into sympathy with Him, on this great point, this root-matter, we are enabled to see Him as He is, in all His large, free, ever-flowing forgiveness; are enabled to discern and grasp "the exceeding riches of His grace toward us." The confession of our sins puts us *en rapport* with Him, and we hear the beating, we touch the depths, of His magnanimous heart.

Persons between whom there is no common sentiment or feeling, no sympathetic chord, cannot really mingle and blend, cannot really be understood and appreciated of one another; but *one* little feeling

in *common*—in the midst of many differences—one little feeling in common, will often suffice to knit them closely, and, in a good degree, to lay them open to each other—to let them into each other's secret places. And we cannot know what God is, cannot receive and realise the fulness of His forgiving love, while yet there is no response in our hearts, to His crucifixion of Spirit over sin, and His sorrowful recognition of our sinfulness. Such unresponsiveness in us, keeps Him veiled and hidden from us, leaves us incapable of beholding and enjoying His glory. But when once we begin to see and suffer somewhat *with Him*, in reference to the terrible disease and ugliness of sin, when once our hearts begin to echo somewhat His cry against it, *then* are we on the way to impressions of what He is, to a sense of His great pitifulness, and His tender mercy, to a blessed hearing of the music of His compassions that fail not, of the pardon that for ever streams, and ceases not.

True, people who are utterly without any burden because of their transgressions, who have no trouble of mind about them, are often found murmuring lightly to themselves, as they return again and again to their evil ways, that the Almighty is graciously forgiving. But that light murmuring is not the beautiful grasp and conviction of His forgiveness, within them. It is only a mere formula which they adopt, or a mere idea which they indulge, to *prevent* the feeling of their sin,—to shield them from the pain of having its

sinfulness laid open to them, and being led to renounce and loathe it. Their word, "God is forgiving," is *but* a word, but a manufactured charm of their own, with which they lull themselves back, continually, to deeper and deeper repose in sin.

It is true, also, that the effect of a conscience of evil, is sometimes to make the Divine pardon a thing incredible, a thing that cannot be accepted and embraced. A man *so feels* his unrighteousness, we say, that he is unable to believe that there is pardon. But this betrays a state of mind, not *really* in accord with the mind of God, and therefore an imperfect confession—something less and lower than sympathy with Him. It has its root, generally, in a vague, false notion on the part of the awakened transgressor, that some penance, some endurance of suffering by himself, must be necessary, as a kind of expiation; that there must be a call upon him to do some great thing, or to bear some hard thing, as a kind of price for so large a remission. He cannot be quite content to receive it freely. When he exclaims, "Oh, my sins are too many and aggravated to be forgiven," at the bottom of his heart lies the thought—however concealed or disguised—that he ought to pay something for it; not having yet arrived at a sufficiently correct, or adequate conception of sin; not having yet felt enough *what it is*, to feel that it is *wholly inexpressible*, that nothing can be done, but that God should pardon it *freely*, with a view to its gradual purification.

And this brings me to the *second* reply concern-

ing the apparent contradiction which the text gives to the truth, that the forgiveness of sin is original and fundamental, in the Divine relations with men. *That*, you observe, which is made to depend here upon confession, is not the mere forgiveness, which yet, as we have seen, *does* need confession to complete it—to complete it both in Him who grants it, and in those to whom it is granted; but it is forgiveness, followed by deliverance from all unrighteousness, which the Apostle represents as hanging upon our confession, and to be reached through it. His thought was dwelling, evidently, *not* on pardon,—except as a means to an end, a preliminary to something further—but on *cleansing*. *That* was the point which he was contemplating, the achievement toward which he was looking; and pardon is only introduced by him as a step in that direction, as a necessary preparation for it, without which, of course, it could not be accomplished. For it is essential that God should first forgive sinful creatures, to enable Him to commence and prosecute the work of educating them out of their sinfulness, of purging and recovering them from it; while, until *they* have received into their hearts the consciousness of forgiveness, the *inspiration*, requisite to impel and constrain them toward purer things, is wanting in them; until *He*, in His own mind and determination, has forgiven them, He cannot throw Himself into the enterprise of endeavouring to purify them, cannot be free to deal with them as children—as children to be taught and disciplined for their improvement. He must

say, "These creatures, who have transgressed, and are always transgressing, against Me, but whom I desire to change into obedient and filially sympathetic creatures, *I begin* with forgiving, and will *go on* continuing to forgive, whatever fresh transgressions they commit; that I may carry out My holy purpose with regard to them." Hence, on account of this purpose it is, that God's forgiveness of us must lie back of all things, at the very starting-point and foundation; that it must be the state of things into which we are born, and in which we daily live. And this *is* His purpose. How, indeed, could it be otherwise with Him, who is at once the eternal righteousness, and the eternal love?

Nor are we understanding St. John in the passage before us, I am persuaded, unless we see that what he contemplates there, as depending upon our confession of sin, is just our purification from sin; or, in other words, our being made good; with reference to which, our forgiveness clears and prepares the way. Thus, his teaching is, that the faithful and just One, whose fidelity and rectitude led Him to determine on effecting our redemption from all impurity, can yet only *begin* with us, through *our* recognition, *our* humble, sorrowful, self-accusing recognition, of the impurity that stains us; that while His rectitude of nature, which makes evil intolerable to Him, and His fidelity to the idea of Creator and Father, which disables Him from leaving any of us to our degradation uncorrected;—that while these compel Him

to the task of restoring and transfiguring a corrupt world ; yet in none of us can He work the salvation He desires, except through our coming to see and feel, with shame and distress, the fact of our corruption. "If we confess our sins,"—*so*, and *so alone*, can His faithfulness and justice, forgiving us our sins, "*cleanse* us from all unrighteousness." As in the previous verse of the chapter, "If we walk in the light as He is in the light,"—that is, in the light of reality, perceiving and bearing the burden of things as they really are, viz. our own defect and defilement,—*then*, and then alone, "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin ;" *then* the process has started within us, which shall issue in complete sanctification.

Of course, there is nothing new, nothing but what is quite obvious, in the announcement, that only as we are roused to a disturbing sense of our wrongness, *can* the Almighty Father,—whatever His yearnings may be,—succeed in bringing us to rightness. But, then, we need to be reminded of this, and to have it again and again pressed upon us ; for, in receiving the truth of a God *bent* upon saving us, whose holy love cannot rest content with aught less than the final elimination of all evil from His universe, and the final perfecting of all His creatures,—in receiving such truth, men are apt to forget, that no participation in the redemption and glory can be theirs, without their repentance ; that, to partake in it, they will have to loathe their sins and repent.

Some of you, hearing me speak often, according

to my grand belief, of how God loves us, and longs after us—of how He means not, either the destruction, or the eternal torments, of any, but is intent upon realising for everyone of us a noble destiny, an ultimate radiance and blessedness of being, and will never *cease* from the pursuit, to which, always faithful and just, always loyal to Himself, and of unchanging rightness, He will always be *impelled*;—some of you, hearing me, may have gone away lightly, pleased with the idea that there was nothing left to trouble about, whether in relation to yourselves or others, since anyhow you were all “doomed to be saved;” and I believe that, as Frances Cobbe has phrased it, we *are* all “doomed to be saved;” but *not anyhow—not anyhow*. That is a great and terrible mistake. “*If* we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Let none vainly imagine, let none foolishly dream, that purification, sooner or later, is to be granted them, as shower and sunshine are granted to unfruitful fields; that, sooner or later, they are to find themselves growing divine, as the garden in spring finds itself blushing with verdure and flowers. No, gentlemen; you will have to suffer and be in agony for it; will have to groan and be scourged toward it; will have to weep, and fight your way into it with violence. The beauty of goodness will never come to you, except through deep convictions,—except through many a painful heart vision, and many a mighty heart stirring, such as hitherto,

perhaps, you have not known. You will have to *confess your sins*, to feel the burden of their wrongness and disorder, to go mournfully because of them, to yearn, and strive to put them off from you, and cast them down in remorse and renunciation before the Lord, as hitherto perhaps you have not done ; and managing to escape this *now*, managing to resist or neutralise *now*, the influences that, if encouraged and cultivated, would lead to it ; managing *now* to live untroubled, and at ease in unrighteousness, notwithstanding the tuition of the Gospel ; to what awful severities of discipline are you condemning yourselves, under the loving rule of Him, who *will have you to be saved*, and who *must* have you quickened into earnestness, by any means, in order that He may save you.

The Father only knows, the painful measures which *they* may be rendering it necessary for Him to employ with them, whom nothing has yet been effectual to bring to repentance,—who are able to live from day to day, amid the teachings of the earthly life, and the earthly scene, and in the light of the truth that plays upon them from the face of Christ, *without* being moved to *confess their sins* ; without finding that disquieting, humbling self-knowledge, and rising into that Divine trouble of dissatisfaction and discontent, through which alone is made possible, the cleansing from all unrighteousness, on which God the faithful and the just, the true and the holy, is unchangingly resolved.



## "PERFECTED FOR EVER."

HEBREWS x. 14—17.

"For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us : for after that He said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them ; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."

**T**HE writer of this Epistle, whoever he was, had grand ideas about the work of Christ. In his estimation it was a work of power that would never be undone, that would never cease to operate for good. It seemed to him that He had wrought and established something of great benefit that would never fail, that would never lose its importance and value ; that to the end of time men would continue to be blest in Him.

There are many, nowadays, who would not agree with these views ; they would say, on the contrary, that the world is gradually leaving Christ behind ; that He is being gradually outrun and superseded ; that although He bulks largely in the history of the past, His figure is slowly paling and diminishing, and in the future will scarcely be visible at all. Yet if they mean

simply that *as a person* He is fading, and is destined still further to fade until He shall be almost entirely lost sight of, it would not therefore follow that our writer's estimation was mistaken and false. Suppose that He were to be crowded out and forgotten in the course of advancing ages,—His *work* might remain undestroyed, His *effect* might survive among us, and within us, notwithstanding.

Are we not to-day eating the fruit, and reposing beneath the shade of many goodly trees, the laborious planters of which, perchance with blood of their own self-sacrifice, are no more known or thought of? What forces contributing to progress have issued from the deeds and darings of noble souls, who are no longer widely honoured or remembered! Have we not looked upon cathedrals which for centuries have been thrilling with awe and worship, the spectators of their majesty, and that will go on exciting the same emotions, producing the same effect for centuries to come, though the very names of their architects have perished? And Christ has done for us in the flesh, what no declining recognition of Him, as a personal factor, would avail to rob us of; that is to say, He has sown in our midst, ideas and impressions, sympathies and aspirations, that are still active in not a few who have already fallen off from Him, and from which humanity will never be able to free itself. I, for one, do not apprehend in the least, that He is about to resolve into "a roseate cloud," or "an azure streak upon the horizon behind us;" but if it were so, it would not involve the scattering and

dispersion of His work, any more indeed than will the ultimate mysterious absorption of Him in the Father, to which St. Paul looked forward. He has accomplished, by His consecration and devotion, what shall be *for ever*, whether He Himself shall continue to be the object of attraction and worship that He has been, and is, or not. We may withdraw from Him, but the imprint of His manifestation will not withdraw from us; ideas and impressions, sympathies and aspirations of His producing, have become part and parcel of the world's inheritance, and are abiding powers in its onward growth and development.

But leaving this, let us consider for a little the particular achievement which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews ascribes to Him. Addressing certain persons who, under the inspiration of faith in Him, were striving earnestly to fight their way up out of lingering impurities and depravities toward something truer and better,—who were in process of moral and spiritual improvement, who were being sanctified,—he says: "Christ by His one self-offering has once for all perfected you."

The statement is obviously paradoxical. There were high-aiming, nobly-aspiring people among the Apostle's readers, who were anything but perfect, as with like characters among ourselves; men whose beauty was, at the best, pale, flaw-intersected, and dashed with blots and stains; whose defects were no less visible to themselves than they were patent to others. The idea of telling

them they were already perfected! But a "paradox" is a word which, while saying what seems contradictory of truth, and absurd, yet hides within it a reality; so here, though we are still far from perfect, there are senses in which Christ may be said to have perfected us; not, indeed, as some would explain it, by inducing the Almighty to *imagine* us faultless in spite of our actual faults, or by throwing over us the disguise of an imputed righteousness, beneath which much wrongness lurks; *that* would be a poor, miserable, dishonest thing, and would make the great Father to be altogether such an one as many of ourselves; content to rest in mere semblances and appearances, to find satisfaction and content in pretending. No, that is not the way in which we are perfected; if it were, I could receive no comfort or peace from the thought of it, and should not care to preach about it.

How, then, shall we understand the affirmation of the text? Let me endeavour briefly to explain, according to my conception of its meaning, which seems to me twofold. Thus I would say, in the first place, that Christ has perfected us *in Himself, objectively*,—in the manner of an object presented to our view. Such is emphatically the teaching of the New Testament Scriptures, where He is set forth, as not merely an eminent man among men, but as "*the* Son of man," the one central, complete, finished man, who offered Himself "without spot to God;" with whom God is "well pleased;" in whom God is entirely

propitiated or satisfied : as "*the Son of man,*" in whom has been incarnated the divine ideal of human grace and duty. Christ exemplifies and describes before us, our perfection ; in other words, we have got from Him—from Himself in His life and sufferings—a clear image and impression of what we are meant to be, and ought to be ; He has made us see the summit to be aimed at, the figure to grow into ; we know and understand from Him what it is to be *men*.

Now this is a great thing, a very great thing ; nothing is achieved, nothing won, without some ideal ; until you get an ideal suspended in the mind's eye, you lie inert and languid ; you have no force or vigour, you trickle away and run to waste. Hence the wretched condition, and the eventual ignominy of many a young man ; he just *drifts* and *drifts*, following each impulse as it rises, taking each circumstance as it comes ; he cannot tell you what he would like to be, or do ; his soul harbours no cherished dream ; he has no picture before him of the life to be lived, of the end to be pursued and gained ; he is open, in a languid way, to anything that may be proposed, but is *determined* on none. Such an one grows more limp and flaccid, more loose and dissipated in tone, from day to day, until at length, perchance, touching some rock against which the wave of events has borne him, he breaks up and goes to pieces, a wreck upon the waters. It is a supremely important and helpful thing to have an ideal. If you ever arrived with labour and patience at any fine goal, it was

by starting from it. If you have ever won a true victory, it was by beginning the battle with it. We never succeed in any work except as we finish it first. Men are always being urged on and carried forward in this way. When the young tradesman opens his shop, or the young politician enters Parliament, each has his vision of what the issue should be; each sees his summit in the air before him, whether it be a suburban villa, with carriage and conservatory, or a seat in the Cabinet; and the more vivid the vision, the greater will be the zeal and energy. Some may say: "Oh, this is foolish; do not look forward, do not indulge in splendid dreams; confine yourselves to to-day—shut your eyes, and act without seeing or imagining whither it will carry you." But it is not foolish. The conception and contemplation of possible attainment, of what we *would* be, helps us to work. So in the moral sphere; we must have our ideal, if we are to accomplish anything, and, the higher the ideal, the nobler will be the effect—the finer the growth.

"Who aimeth at the sky shoots higher much  
Than he who means a Tree."

Now, of all the ideas that have existed of human grace and duty, those cherished in Christendom are the highest. Men have received an idea of what it is to be a man, since the manifestation of Jesus Christ, far superior to any that had been possessed before. He has perfected us. Yes, and has perfected us once for all. Many among

us, who have ceased to cling to Him,—from whence did they derive their conception of the manner of persons that we ought to be,—their grand ideas with reference to life, and self-denial, and trust in an all-wise, all-knowing, and all-merciful Father? They imbibed them at their mother's knees, as, in twilight hours, and on quiet Sunday evenings, she taught them "Christ"—the Christ whom since, they have learnt to disown; while yet, the *effect* of Him remains vital within them, still moving them on to noble ends. But in Him, thank God! we *see* our perfection; looking at Him, the brave, beautiful, sinless Man, in whom, under the burden and discipline of life, the process of glorification goes on from day to day, until at length the human is so divined, so sublimed, that He sweeps up and away, toward the radiance of the celestial spheres; looking at Him, we recognise and feel, that here is the representative Man, the Man in the direction of whom we have to yearn and strive,—to the height of whom we are to come,—that here is the living, breathing anticipation of the glory to which God is calling and designing to bring us. And is there not a wonderful inspiration and strength in this—in this presentment to us of our perfection, as we look and say, "There is our self that is to be; there is the full flower of our bud, the midsummer of our struggling and chequered spring?"

But this is not all that Christ has done: the passage we have read conveys something more, viz. that He has *perfected us germinally*, in the manner of a rudiment engendered within us

"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord; I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them." He not only realises personally my perfection, before my eyes, saying, "See, here *you* are; here is your true efflorescence and fulfilment," although that is much; but He sows in me the seed of my perfection, gives me what tends to bring it about, endues me with the power of developing it.

Now, such is always the Divine method of working. God is no mere manufacturer of ready-made articles, but the originator of powers for making; He creates what He creates, not in full-blown completeness, but in seminal energy. His principle is *evolution*,—the unfolding of wonders from secret germs,—the evoking of grand possibilities, to be slowly actualised,—the inbreathing of strength to grow. He gives, not a house swept and garnished, but the material with which to build it. And, correspondingly, Christ on earth spoke words, which, instead of being exhaustive expositions, or beaten-out rules, were pregnant hints or principles to be applied, while His miracles were wrought, not to save men the trouble of doing, but to *enable* them to do—by setting the leper free to re-enter society, and the paralytic and the blind to labour.

Now I do not want to be *made* perfect, to be made perfect from without, at a stroke,—that would be, at the best, but a poor piece of work, and liable at any moment to crumble and drop in pieces,—I want to be made *capable of becoming* perfect: that is true and grand work. My friends, there is

nothing truer and grander, nothing more really Divine, than to be instrumental in stirring or stimulating others toward higher things, in quickening them to strive, or grow, toward something greater. As for myself, I will not mind much what I say or how I fail—what I contribute, or how I appear, and am judged, if only I can serve you a little *thus*, if only I can be the means of helping you to a larger capacity for developing righteousness. Some men are men of might in this direction; to spend a season with them, to breathe their atmosphere, and listen to their talk, is to come away stronger in healthy and holy inclination, more open to the heavens, and more disposed for duty, with heart and mind inspired, and moral will invigorated. You feel anew the reality and dignity of life; you feel a finer spirit within you. "And when we were yet *without strength*, Christ died for us." He perfects us germinally; and how? According to the representation of the text, by working into us convictions—right and noble convictions—as distinguished from mere sentiments, or opinions. "After those days, saith the Lord, I will put My laws into their hearts, and write them in their minds." Here are right things, that had only been perceived, assented to, and acknowledged,—becoming at length inward principles.

There are some persons who have no principles, no convictions; they are little more than bundles of sentiments, notions, opinions; and hence you never know where to find them; they are every-

thing by turns, and nothing long. Others there are who have good opinions, and wrong convictions, and hence the contradictions often observable in them : while *holding* what is good, they *do* mostly what is wrong ; our conduct being determined, not by our opinions, but by our convictions. A man's convictions and his opinions are often sadly opposed to each other, and in the crisis of temptation, the opinion is always over-ruled and over-ridden by the conviction. Our opinions are outward things ; our convictions, as some one has said, are just "the growth and result of our passions, affections, aspirations, and sympathies ; the flower into which these open and expand ;" and they are our convictions, therefore, that make character and life, that decide the man.

That which is needed, then, in order to the ultimate production of the perfect man, is the creation of right convictions, which is the work that Christ did for His disciples and apostles in the days of His earthly ministry ; He, and his beauty and truth, wrought upon their passions, affections, aspirations, and sympathies, raising and purifying these, and drawing them forth after Himself, until through these, they got gradually convictions of goodness—convictions of God and immortality, of life and righteousness, that nothing could destroy, and that began to mould and shape them into new men. And this is what Christ always does, more or less, where He lays hold. By discovering to us, and impressing upon us, the divine order under which we are living—the order of God's

Fatherhood and our sonship—by exemplifying the grace and beauty of self-sacrifice, by revealing the love that is infinite, the holiness which broods over us and pours itself out for our salvation; He awakens in us new passions, affections, aspirations, sympathies; and becoming penetrated *thus* with right convictions, the laws of the Most High are put into our hearts, and written upon our minds.

Here is germinal perfection. Once endue a man with right and noble convictions, and he is on the road to all nobleness. Many false ideas and opinions may remain, many unworthy fancies, dispositions, tendencies, may still linger to oppose themselves again and again, and to create no little bewilderment and trouble, but the noble convictions will be gradually and silently doing their work, and must issue, sooner or later, in a noble man. "*Then*,—saith the Lord,—*when* I have put my laws into their hearts, and have written them upon their minds, *then* will I remember their sins and iniquities no more." Then will their redemption from these have begun.

O Christ, who by Thy one offering hast perfected us in Thyself, *objectively*, presenting to us the glory of our grand ideal, and hope; still perfect us in ourselves, *germinally*,—with ever increasing, and ever deepening convictions of the right and the true; even until, some day, the objective shall become subjective, the germinal put forth and fulfil itself, and sin and iniquity be wholly things of the past!





## GEHENNA AND ITS FIRE.

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MARK ix. 43, 44.

"And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off : it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched : where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

**T**HESE words from the lips of Christ ; what do they mean ? That is the question which I am intent on trying to answer according to the vision granted me. It can hardly be that any apology is necessary, in bringing up the question before an assembly of Christian worshippers, or that any difficulty need be felt in doing so. To lovers of poetry and the drama, nothing is much more interesting and absorbing than the study of one of Shakespeare's obscure and controverted passages, nor would they consider time wasted, and energy misspent in attempts to elucidate it ; and with our reverence for, and faith in the Lord Jesus, a dark and hard saying of His, must always possess strong attraction for us, and we shall always be ready and willing to give attention to an honest student's thoughts about it, even when we may half suspect that our own are truer and better.

These words, then ; what do they mean ? They were evidently spoken in a very serious and solemn mood, and were evidently intended to represent a very serious and solemn reality. We cannot read them—thrice repeated as they are—without feeling that. They warn us severely of something to be guarded against and avoided, and that can only be escaped by taking earnest heed to ourselves ; by means of earnest self-discipline ; and the something of which they warn us is clearly of a grave and stern character. But it is conveyed, you see, in figures, not in plain, direct language ; and we are left to find out *what* it is which the figures convey—*what* it is which they were employed to indicate or suggest. And let us remember at the beginning, one thing,—an important and fundamental principle for our guidance, to preserve us from drifting into mistake and error—viz., that whatever, on the first glance, they may *appear* to shadow forth, or however some may have interpreted them, it is impossible, supposing them to have been uttered by Christ, that they should contain aught inconsistent, or at variance, with His own manifestation of God in the flesh, with the image and idea which His whole life and teaching have given us of God—of God in His attitude toward, and His relations with men—with the Father, “*our Father*,” the righteous Father, whom He has declared to us ; nothing inconsistent, or at variance, with this, must we venture to draw from them, unless we would deny the Lord. Should it seem to be there, we

must shrink from and decline to accept it, even though unable to perceive for the time any other adequate explanation; concluding, either that our vision is jaundiced by previous false traditions and influences, or that we have not a correct report of the great Teacher's expressions, and content to wait patiently for further light; determined anyhow, not to admit profanely a contradiction of the God displayed in Christ, for the sake of bowing to the *apparent* sentiment of an obscure verse, and positive anyhow, that the contradiction could not have been delivered by Him; exemplifying thus, a real and reverent allegiance to the Almighty Father, after the manner of a faithful and loyal son, who, on meeting, in the course of a letter from his father, with a clause which he could only understand in a sense that made his father say what he felt to be wholly unworthy of him, and what he knew to be utterly alien from his spirit and character, would unhesitatingly refuse to receive it as his father's word, assured that there must be some different and more satisfactory reading of it, though at present not obvious to him, and resolving to let the clause lie unexplained, until it might yield him, on future inspection, its true import, or until he could see the author of the communication, and ask him about it.

Now we know, without my staying to describe it, what the popular opinion is, concerning the Hell of which Christ speaks; and I must need begin by repudiating it, under the constraint, the irresistible

constraint of the conviction, that it is diametrically opposed to all that He has shown, and told us, of God ; that it contravenes entirely the revelation which He has brought to us of the Father. I do not, however, acknowledge that there is that powerful countenance of it in the text, which has been claimed for it, or that it would have been difficult to derive from thence anything besides. I believe, on the contrary, that a careful and unprejudiced examination of the sentence in the light of the context, and of the Scriptures generally, would have led to far other views—would have discovered in its terms, with ease, a far truer presentation—a presentation stern and severe indeed, yet in perfect harmony with, and not only so, but sweetly illustrative of, the Divine Fatherliness of which Christ was the grand certificate and unveiling ; to my mind, in fact, the ungodlike and terrible Hell of orthodox Christianity would scarcely have been found here at all, but that the searchers, in their approach, brought it with them, and having unwittingly inserted what they brought, it soon appeared,—and to many has ever since appeared,—to belong there ; the difficulty now being to cast it out from thence, and descry the reality which it has overlaid and hidden.

If you ask me how I can account for the origin and growth of the fearful thing, if it came not from the Book, but was carried thither and interjected ; my suggestion would be, that, all God-contradicting and God-dishonouring as it is, it may yet actually have had its root in a profound sense of the

enormity and the hopelessness of sin, engendered by the very impression of God's great love ; thus, thrilled with the wonderful Divine grace and mercy that broke upon them in the face of Christ, and changed and transfigured them, the first believers in the Gospel, saw, as they had never seen before, the hideousness, the baseness, of persistence in sin, and in their intense disgust and horror could imagine nothing for it hereafter but unending woe. Could it deserve less ? Could less be inflicted on it for continued rebellion against, and rejection of, such love ? And then there would be also the feeling—when after a while it has failed to melt and win the transgressor—when after a while he has shown himself able to resist it, what more can possibly be done for him to save him ?—what is left wherewith to persuade him ?—what will remain but to punish him, to punish him with everlasting torment ? I would have us consider that the doctrine of the eternal Hell may be traceable, not to the low, the base, and the savage in our nature, but rather, to the effect produced in relation to the thought of sin—the half delirious, half intoxicating effect produced by the first rich shedding abroad in men's hearts of the love of God ; by the first torrent of enthusiasm for Him that swept them, beneath the new divine revealings of the Incarnation and the Cross. I think it may have been so ; their holy despair of, and wrath against, sin, under the vision of the magnificent Being whom they beheld in these, blinding them for a time, to the patent truth,

that *such* a Being must need go on for ever to seek the cure and conquest of sin, and could never, while He continued the same Being, turn aside from or grow weary of the work; that the love, the withstanding and rejection of which by the sinner aggravates his guilt, and renders him worthy of punishment, is the no less certain promise and pledge with regard to him, that instead of being left, at some point further on, to sink in unextinguishable flames of suffering, he will be pursued, and pursued, with whatever redemptive severities, until the lost is found.

But to come now to the words before us; what do they mean? What *is* this Hell, with its unquenchable fire, of which Christ warns us? To go into Hell was, on His lips, as you know, simply to go into Gehenna, and Gehenna was the Syro-Chaldaic word for the Hebrew "Ga-hinnom," "valley of Hinnom,"—a narrow valley with steep rocky sides, running south-west of Jerusalem; but a ravine with *a history*. It had been, in ancient times, again and again, the scene of abominable and idolatrous rites. There, Solomon had erected high places to Moloch; there, during the reigns of Ahaz and Manasseh, children were burnt alive in honour of the fire-god; the name Tophet (signifying a drum), by which the valley was also designated, having arisen probably from the custom of drowning the cries of the little victims with noisy music. When, however, the devout young Josiah ascended the throne of Judah, and began the work of purging the land from its idols,

he sought to express his abhorrence of the iniquities and atrocities that had been practised in the glen, by *polluting* it with heaps of human bones and other corruption, by making it the receptacle of all manner of uncleanness; from which period it would seem to have become "the common cess-pool of the city, into which its sewage was conducted, to be carried off by the waters of the Kedron," as well as the spot where combustible refuse of various kinds was gathered to be burnt. Hence, the Jews had learned to see in Gehenna, the valley of Hinnom, an image of the place of future punishment, and used the name to denote the doom, the terrible doom, of the wicked. It represented to them,—as being "the lay stall of Jerusalem's filth,"—the ultimate portion of corrupt souls.

Now Christ had already referred to this desecrated gorge, in the Sermon on the Mount, and His first introduction of it there, in a figurative sense, may assist in guiding us to a right understanding of His application of it here. When He declares that whosoever shall call his brother a fool—or rather, a rebel, an apostate—shall be in danger of Gehenna fire, it is obvious that He cannot be intending to represent by this, a state of eternal torment. The good Lord would never have thought of pronouncing a man deserving of such a state, who in a fit of passion, should launch at another a bad name, neither would He have adjudged the utterance to be indicative of an inner moral condition that deserved to be so recom-

pensed ; the idea is too preposterous. But look at the entire passage : " He that is angry with his brother without a cause is in danger of the judgment,"—" the judgment " being the name of those " inferior law-courts, one of which was to be found in every Jewish city, which took cognisance of crimes such as robbery and murder." The words, of course, are not to be interpreted literally, as though they affirmed that causeless anger would render a man liable to be tried by these courts ; the meaning can only be : " He who is causelessly unkind, is, in My estimation, not less worthy of condemnation than he, who, on account of a crime committed by him, is haled before 'the judgment.'" So then, the next statement : " He that saith to his brother, Raca "—thou worthless fellow—" shall be in danger of the Council,"—the highest court of judicature among the Jews, which dealt alone with the more flagrant offences,—*this* would signify that such a reviler was worthy, in the speaker's estimation, of a yet greater condemnation. And then by the sentence : " But whosoever calleth his brother apostate shall be in danger of Gehenna fire," He would intimate, that the man who carried his unreasonable wrath and quarrelsomeness so far as to slander his neighbour, by applying to him the worst epithet that a Jew could possibly apply to a Jew,—that *he* deserved to be excluded from society, to be shrunk from and avoided as an unclean thing ; that he was fit only to be thrust out among *the filth* of Gehenna.

It seems evident, that in speaking of Gehenna

here, our Lord was thinking of it as the place of corruption, as representing the gathering together of the worthless and the outcast. And now mark the antecedent context of the passage here: "If thy hand cause thee to offend, cut it off:" turn resolutely from, and renounce, whatever would hinder your growth and progress in goodness; whatever would prevent your becoming a true and healthy man; whatever would drag you down to a low level: do it at *any* cost, though it should involve the relinquishing of an indulgence, or the sacrifice of an advantage, as dear to you as your hand. "It is better for thee to enter maimed into life,"—better for thee to abridge and deny thyself thus, for the sake of rising toward the higher life, of attaining nobler being—than "to keep two hands,"—to escape losing aught of gratification or comfort to yourself, and go into Gehenna.

Now is not the meaning clear? that Gehenna was the state of moral unwholesomeness, of corruption, to which *they* would invariably reduce themselves, who refused to give up what they felt to be perilous, or prejudicial to their interests, as moral creatures; who should shrink from the suffering of letting go any habit or pleasure, any gain or prospect, which lay in the way, and which they knew to lie in the way, of their assimilation to the Divine. When Christ says, Better life with self-mortification, than self-indulgence with Gehenna, Gehenna on His tongue, must needs stand for *corruption*, since corruption is the antithesis of life, and the literal Gehenna, as we have seen, was

emphatically *the place of corruption*. Yes, the Hell by which Christ warns us to be loyal to the demands of faith, to the voice of the soul within us, is just the inward depravity which disloyalty and unfaithfulness in such directions are certain to breed; and what hell can be worse than *that*, whether the subject of it have the sense of its ugliness and wretchedness, or not? It has overtaken many around us. There are many who have kept, again and again, their two hands, rather than part with one of them in fidelity to God and right, and who are now, here upon the earth, weltering in the Gehenna of corruption, the spiritual element in them shrivelled and deadened; moral will and moral purpose infirm, diseased, paralysed; their finer susceptibilities and sensibilities decayed; the once sweet, pure heart a cage of uncleanness; there they lie, at home and abroad, working and laughing, eating and drinking, *in Hell*. Nor are any of us, ever guilty of unfaithfulness to conscience, of cleaving to self-gratification, when it calls us to deny ourselves, without more or less of participation in the same hell. Every violation of the soul tends to engender something of 't; something of spiritual vitiation and debasement.

But the Lord Jesus goes on to speak—and speaks most emphatically and impressively—of *the fire* of Gehenna; passing thus, from the thought of the corruption induced by unworthy self-indulgence, to the thought of what such corruption shall be subject to. "Gehenna," He says, "is frequently lit up with fires—fires kindled for the consumption

of the refuse collected there ; and remember, that in the moral world of God, wherever there is corruption, *there*, sooner or later, *fire* will surely come, to attack it remorselessly, until it shall be purged away. If, instead of cutting off your hand, when need arises, in order to preserve yourself wholesome and healthy, you fondly retain both hands, and grow corrupt, the issue will be, that the corruption formed shall meet, ere long, with fire, seeking its destruction. If you decline to save yourself from it, by rejecting that which begets it, think not, that you will be left to grovel in it in peace, for the flames shall lay hold upon it ; *it will have to be burned out of you.*

And has not this often happened before our eyes? A young man clinging to, and following, his lower impulses, in defiance of the monitions of the higher, becomes gradually a corrupt soul, goes down gradually into Hell—into the valley of dead men's bones, and all uncleanness; and there, at length, he encounters fire, in the shape of a fiery trial of squandered means, ruined health, and body blasted with disease; and coming home to lie and suffer, *through* his sufferings he learns repentance, until he returns to life, or, perhaps, passes away into the other world, a healed and purified soul ; his corruption consumed in the fire. Has it not often happened thus? Have we not seen Gehenna men, caught, and wrapped in fire that burnt till they were purged? It is the same with nations. How frequently did the fire play upon the ancient Jews, as they sank into corruption, and from time

to time become their cleansing ! Because they refused to keep themselves sweet, choosing the indulgence that brought putrefaction, rather than the denial that would have yielded life, there came among them again and again, devouring fires of affliction. And how was it in our own days, for example, with America ? She contracted the corruption of slavery ; it was her plague-spot upon the body of her beauty—a plague-spot that she would not, with sacrifice, put off from her ; and though it tarried long, at last the fire came, fierce and terrible, and beneath its burning the spot disappeared, and she rose redeemed. Oh yes, Christ's words have proved themselves true, both in the experience of individuals, and in the histories of peoples : *corruption brings fire*. Surrender ignobly to your lower nature, decline to grow a man, a true, divine man, by working against the grain, by resisting the unworthy, and disciplining yourself for life, and you *do* go into Hell, and Hell involves fire—fire for the consumption of the corruption, which your surrender has produced.

Christ, you see, says not a word concerning *the time when*—says nothing whatever to imply that the fire is reserved for the future world. The Jews may have used Gehenna to symbolise the lot of the corrupt *after* death, but He was not bound by their ideas ; He adopted their figures, indeed, but put His own wider and deeper meanings into them, and He never leads us to suppose that the fire to which corruption is exposed, is *all*

on the *other* side the grave. He knew that it would be *there* for those whose condition needed it, just as He knew that it was *here*. "Corruption ensures fire,"—*that* was all He said, leaving us to conclude that if the fire burn not *here*, or, burning, fail to destroy, why then, it will burn *there*, and burn there to destroy, since corruption must be consumed.

But you may ask, perhaps, did not Christ design to convey, rather, by His words, the *pain* and *woe* with which it would be punished?—that they who allow themselves to become corrupt, are destined to be tormented—merely tormented? No, I answer, unhesitatingly, because that would be at variance with His own manifestation of God, who is revealed by Him as seeking to "make an end of sin," "to destroy the works of the devil," "to turn every one from his iniquity," and to pursue "the lost until it is found."

Such a God could never *finish* with the transgressor by plunging him in torment; He could only finish with him, by constraining him to cease from his transgressions, which must always be the Divine end in dealing with him, so long as he remains unreformed. True, the application of fire to him implies suffering; but the object contemplated in making him suffer, or in leaving him to suffer, will be his *cleansing*, not his *torment*. The Scriptures tell us, that under the Divine government, chastening is for correction—teach us that this is one of the paternal principles of the Almighty; and can we imagine that, being God, He

will ever change His principles? Can we venture to impute such variableness to the immutable One? Let us beware of the profanity.

But consider, now, for a moment, two things. *First*, the figure employed—the fire of Gehenna. And for what were the fires of Gehenna lighted? To inflict pain and anguish? No; but to get rid of the city's impurity. All its various filth was there; and for what purpose? That by the action of fire, it might be licked up, and purged away. The flame of the valley of Hinnom cannot be made to represent the awful *suffering* in store for sin; it can only fitly represent the certain *consumption* of sin, to be effected through the *sharpness* of fire.

Then consider, *secondly*, the succeeding context of the passage,—where, after having warned us that if we will not accept the painfulness, the often great painfulness, of preserving ourselves from corruption, we shall surely be cast into fire,—our Lord proceeds to add, "For everyone shall be salted with fire." Here, then, is His own explanation—if men would but have recognised and received it—of what He meant by threatening our corruption with fire; and it shows that He had been contemplating, not an instrument of fearful torment, but an instrument of salvation from putrefaction. To be salted with fire, as the Hebrew sacrifices were salted with salt, sets forth fire, not as an avenging, but as a preserving, purifying agency; and such fire, says Christ, not a single soul shall miss; you must *all* be cleansed;

the Father will have it so, the Father is determined on it. But there can be no cleansing, there can be no rising out of sin into holiness, out of evil into good habits, without some fire of pain. *It is the salt* through which, in connection with which, we can alone become pure oblations, offerings of a sweet smell to God. You may inflict it upon yourselves *now* if you will, so that it may not have to be inflicted on you *hereafter*; you may now suffer, to 'live, if you will, of your own act and resolve, by cutting off the hand that causes you to offend, and I exhort you to do it. But if you will not, if you choose to go on in the corruption of self-indulgence, rather than endure, in order to life, the fiery smart of self-denial; be sure that you will not, therefore, escape the fire. Nay, your state of corruption will bring upon you, sooner or later, a yet severer ordeal; for, since the Father will have all men to be saved, everyone shall be salted with fire, if not by himself now, then somehow with God's ordering, and in God's way, later on. Refrain, shrink back from the voluntary self-infliction, if you will; but better, oh, better, to begin at once, and to continue burning your way into life with needful flames of self-discipline, than to develop, by weak and sinful yielding, a mass of corruption that will have to be burned out of you with hotter flames of Divine chastisement, together with keener heat of personal remorse and labour.

Thus, it seems to me, does Christ make His meaning clear. Such, it seems to me, is the fire

of God, which He promises to souls that will not suffer, to heal and educate themselves—fire, not for vengeful punishment, but for purifying correction; fire rendered certain and inevitable by *His* holy love, who cannot leave aught of corruption in any of us unassailed, or unconsumed.

But this fire is never to be quenched: "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." Now, these words are adapted, you know, from the ancient Book of Isaiah, which—closing with the prediction of a coming great destruction of Israel's enemies, when they should be gathered in their pride and wickedness before Jerusalem—declares that as often thereafter, as the Lord's people assembled to worship Him in the Holy City, they should "go forth, and look upon the carcases of the men who had transgressed against Him; for their worm should not die, neither should their fire be quenched." It is patent, of course, that this is not to be understood literally: there must come *an end* to a conflagration of dead bodies.

The prophet would mean by his language, one of two things: either that the conflagration should never be extinguished in the *memory* of his grateful countrymen, so long as they lived—that their deliverance, and the doom of these transgressors, should be vividly recalled by them on each annual visit to the metropolis, to the end of their lives; or else, that nothing should put the fire out, while any portion of the carcases remained to be devoured—that it should be unquenchable

*until* it had done its work, and all was entirely consumed. The word is frequently used in a like limited sense, in the Old Testament Scriptures, to describe, not the absolute everlastingness of a judgment, but merely its certainty—its inexorable-ness, and its unrelenting continuance as long as the subjects of it continued impenitent; until it had thoroughly accomplished its purpose. “Thus saith the Lord, Because ye have forsaken Me, My wrath shall be kindled against this place, and not be quenched.” Says Jeremiah in foretelling the woe for the cities of Judah, on account of their abominations, “His anger and His fury shall be poured out upon them, upon man and beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and not be quenched.” And again: “I will kindle a fire in the gates of Jerusalem, and it shall devour the palaces thereof, and it shall not be quenched.”

When, then, Christ quoted the words of the Hebrew seer concerning the conflagration of Israel's enemies, and applied them to the fire to which corrupt souls are to be subjected, and with which they are to be salted, what could He mean, according to Scripture usage, but that the fire should not fail without fulfilling the Father's design with regard to them; that so long as aught of their corruption lingered, needing some fiery trial for its correction, so long should it remain, “unquenchable”—“unquenchable” until the corruption had given way, and disappeared beneath it?

Such, to my vision, is our Saviour's blessed

Gospel of good news, with reference to Hell-fire; that it is the fire with which God is striving, and will be always striving, to *consume sin*;—that if we neglect or refuse to judge ourselves, for our purification, He will judge us, and that nothing shall cause Him to refrain—neither the circumstance of our passing from the present world into the next, nor the continued obstinacy of our impenitence and resistance; that He will be unquenchable toward us, burning against our evil resolutely and perseveringly *for ever*, even until there is no more sin.

O Christ, I thank Thee for Thy word that sin is doomed—that it shall be destroyed; that the Father will never grow tired; that His fire is inextinguishable; it is one of Thy sweet words to me. Sometimes, it seems as if the conquest of sin were hopeless—as if it never would be, never was to be, made an end of. The ages succeed the ages, and still it survives and revives; but be of good courage, says Christ, its destruction is certain. God is meeting, and will be always meeting, the corruption of men with His fires, and His fire is unquenchable.

O Thou speaker of glad tidings, which shall be to all people, I thank Thee.

But, brethren, fire *is* fire, and the holy love *can* be very sharp. Let us not tarry in self-indulgence and wrongness, to make our cleansing the harder for God, and the more painful for us. "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged," and it is better to enter into life through the

suffering of present self-discipline, and self-denial, than sink by degrees, through guilty self-pleasing, into a gehenna of corruption, to encounter there the "salting" of the fire which is unquenchable. "Now is the accepted time;" let now be "the day of our salvation."







## DIVES IN HELL.

LUKE xvi. 22—31.

"And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom : the rich man also died, and was buried ; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue : for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things : but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed : so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot ; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, Father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house : for I have five brethren ; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets ; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, Father Abraham : but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

**I**S it not,—let me first ask,—is it not *satisfactory* to be assured that such a man as Dives came at length to be "in torments?"—to read, after the description given of him, that Christ, on following him from hence into the other world, found him actually stung and anguish-struck ; no longer the contented,

complacent, untroubled soul that he had been, sunk in the enjoyment of dressing and eating, of fine linen and sumptuous fare, with Lazarus the beggar starving unheeded at his gate, but roused into exceeding discomposure and pain? What could we have desired more for him, than that he, in whom neither the suffering of a fellow-creature, nor the meanness and vileness of his own sensual, selfish life, awoke apparently the least ruffling pang, should, in process of time—if not on earth, yet on leaving the earth—be overtaken with pangs, sharp and severe? Must we not feel that nothing better could have happened to him, that the change was good and hopeful? There are persons, you know, who vex and afflict us, just because they seem so untortmentable, and whose easy-mindedness leads us to sigh for them. That they are obstinately serene or jovial, that they are not cast down or sorrowful,—*this* is our burden with reference to them, and *this* our despair concerning them. We say: "Oh that they were but capable of being a little disquieted and distressed!" It would rejoice us to learn that they had begun to worry or grieve; we should welcome it with thankfulness, as a sign of commencing health, as a promise of improvement.

The school-boy, coming home for the holidays, term after term, always unsuccessful in competition, and ignominiously outstripped and beaten by lads much younger than himself, yet always tranquil, satisfied, smiling: what would not his father give to see him chafed and disturbed; to see him,

instead of enjoying the vacation so thoroughly,—lift up his eyes in torment.

The novice, called to a position of great importance and responsibility, installed in a post that even superior ability and experience might well be awed by, and occupying it lightly, airily, confidently, with scarce a quickening of the pulse, or the least tremor of apprehension and anxiety : who would not wish that it were otherwise ; that his cheek blanched, and his heart throbbed painfully ? And who would not think more highly of him, and anticipate more from him, if they did ?

A man, living surrounded by scenes of human disorder and wretchedness, and able the while to go on growing grapes, and cultivating rose-trees, and amusing himself with dainty dinners, or idle dilettantism, without the slightest trouble in his breast : do we not esteem it his disgrace, and an evidence of defect of nature, that he *can* ; and should we not be gratified to hear that his life was spoilt for him with palpitations of trouble—trouble that would allow him no longer to enjoy ?

Have we not known men, whose shame and degradation, whose peril and curse it was, that they were not in torments, concerning themselves, and who needed to be so, that they might be roused and saved, of whom nothing good could be made, and for whom nothing good could be hoped, until they began to be ? Have we not seen men die, on whose behalf all that it was possible to desire was, that they might lift up their eyes in torment ; their condemnation, and their

exclusion from true blessedness being, that they had not learned to do so while here; that they had lived entombed in a blind and false serenity, insensible to the awfulness of existence, to the solemnity of being; insensible to the deformity of their own figure, to the offence and ugliness of their own corruption—at *ease* in a state of terrible *disease*? What could cheer and gladden us more with regard to them, than to believe, as we saw them expire, as they vanished from our sight, that at last, behind the veil, their deadly destructive repose would be interrupted—would be broken in upon with waves of pain?

Well, now, in the passage before us, we have Christ pursuing such an one into the spirit-world, and discovering and disclosing him there, “in torment.” Is it not something to rejoice at: Dives wrapped in a low and unworthy content, amidst which, not even Lazarus’ distress and misery can prevail to disturb him; and luxuriously unconscious of the leprosy of his mean satisfaction, and his cold selfishness—Dives after death, at all events, beginning to be in torment? Is it not something to rejoice at? For, let me ask you next to observe, that the anguish into which he is represented as dying, is the anguish of *waking*—waking to truth and reality. That it is so,—that the Divine Seer and Teacher is portraying here in an objective form, what He beheld taking place subjectively, in the *mind* of the deceased rich man; and that He meant to exhibit this as a sign of awakening—of awakening with agony—to truth and reality that had been unfelt

before ;—that it is so, may be inferred from the fourteenth and fifteenth verses, to which you must look, it seems to me, for the clue and key to a right understanding of the scene :—

*“The Pharisees, who were covetous, heard all these things, and they derided Him ; and He said, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men ; but God knoweth your hearts : for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.”*

He had been exhorting His disciples to the practice of giving freely out of their receipts, and warning them against the endeavour to serve at once the Lord and mammon ; and the Pharisees standing by, laughed at His word, being covetous. *“Being covetous,”*—it sounded foolish and ridiculous to them ; so steeped were they in worldliness, that such teaching appeared to them *a joke* ; and Christ beholding them, says in effect : “Ah, you do not perceive what miserable creatures you are ; your actual quality is hidden from you ; you commend and approve yourselves, dreaming that you are faultless and correct, but it is not so. There is One who discerns that it is not, and to Him, that which you admire, is odious and repulsive.” And then comes the story of Dives and Lazarus, the point of which, therefore, must be,—not a difference of lot between the rich and the poor hereafter, nor yet the hopeless suffering of the wicked in the future, in contrast with the rest and rapture of the good,—but the agonised waking-up of a blind, worldly soul in death, to the

awful truth about himself, and to the startling reality of things in relation to which he has been peacefully asleep ; and the revulsion in his views and feelings which such a waking would produce.

It was indeed a Gospel of good news to the self-ignorant and self-deceived Pharisees, could they but have read it aright ; intimating to them that they, who were now so tranquil and complacent in their utter darkness with regard to themselves, and to the actual aspects of life, would in another state, if never in the present, be painfully and terribly enlightened ; be made, with pangs of distress, to see things as they are, and then, and thus, undergo a great change of mind. Yes, the story of Dives and Lazarus is just a description of a fearful, but ultimately beneficial, spiritual awakening on the other side the grave, suggested by the spectacle of *their* spiritual slumber, to whom the Divine doctrine was matter for derision, and who contentedly fancied themselves right, while God, the All-seeing, was looking down upon the plague of their wrongness with abhorrence ; Lazarus being introduced simply as a means of giving objectiveness and vividness to the picture.

And now, let us glance for a few minutes at the details, in this light. A sensual and selfish rich man, wholly at ease and quiet in his sensuality and selfishness, having died, begins straightway to suffer torments ; and what was the flame that tormented him ? Mark how subtly yet impressively it is indicated. *First*, he "sees Abraham afar off,

and Lazarus in his bosom." The idea thus clothed and embodied, can hardly be mistaken, can hardly be missed, namely, that then, there awoke in him a consciousness of *his whereabouts*—a consciousness of the small, despicable, low-pitched creature that he was; for had he not always lived comfortably under the assurance that he was a child of Abraham, included in his family and closely related to him, and that he was immeasurably the superior of a poor beggar such as Lazarus? and now behold; Abraham and he altogether apart, widely separated, and Lazarus the beggar, instead of beneath him, on high above him, in Abraham's arms. Here was the revelation to him of the truth with reference to himself, and his rank and place in the Almighty's world. Here was his anguish, that his eyes saw at last, the kind of soul he really was—his real measure and size—his real standing and attitude—remote, miserably remote, from the dignity that he had hitherto assumed to be his; below, ignominiously below, what he had hitherto spurned with contempt. Such self-discovery, after a lifetime of self-delusion, is unspeakably painful. But what possibilities of amelioration does it evoke! Until one perceives and feels his deformity, what hope is there of his straightening himself? Once, however, let him perceive and feel it, and with that vision and conviction,—torturing as it may be, and for a while tending to despair,—with that vision and conviction, *hope is born*, and, according to Christ, to those who live and die without it, death brings it.

But observe, again, in answer to the cry for relief under the intolerable agony of the first flash of the true, "Send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame,"—in answer to that cry for relief, comes the yet further aggravation, of the word: "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." And what is the idea,—what but an awakening of the mind to a new and—under the circumstances—an excruciating estimate of things?

Once, the *evils* which the beggar suffered, had seemed to Dives things of the utmost moment to escape, and be exempt from; things with which existence could not be worth the having; while, on the other hand, the *goods* which he himself enjoyed,—the purple and fine linen and sumptuous fare,—had seemed to him things of the utmost value; things with which a man might rest supremely content, and in possession of which he might exult. But now, having passed out beyond the circle of *time*, to which both Lazarus' "evils" and his own "goods" exclusively belonged; and to transcend which, was to lose them both—now, how different is his estimate of them, alike of the "goods" and of the "evils" which are dependent upon and bound up with *time*, with the visible mundane world; for, grievous as were Lazarus' evils, *being* dependent upon and bound up with the little space of his lifetime, the

dying into eternity has brought him the *comfort* of emancipation from them; and delightful as were Dives' "goods," those also *being* dependent upon and bound up with the little space of his lifetime, the dying into eternity has brought him the *torment* of separation from all his goods. To what smallness and paltriness have dwindled now, both the "goods" and the "evils" of time, that once appeared to him, the one, so worthy of reposing and rejoicing in, and the other, of praying against and deprecating; and what anguish is his, under the sense of the nakedness and impoverishment which he has entailed upon himself, through having made his whole portion in goods that could only be received during his lifetime. The voice of Abraham in the story, is just the objective presentation of the new and excruciating estimate of things which he had learned in death. And to learn to appreciate duly, and to discriminate rightly between higher and lower values—between the little and great in importance—this is a hopeful and promising acquisition, with whatever mortification and suffering it may be gained.

But there is something further, of which Dives became painfully conscious,—even of a great fixed gulf, so that, says Abraham, "they who would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us who would come from thence;"—in which stroke of the picture, we see him waking to the fact, that our deepest and most fundamental relations are *spiritual*, and that according to these we are really classified, and take our place in the universe of

God, that, according to these, they who *seem* near to one another, are often utterly remote from each other. He was an Israelite, who read the Scriptures, and worshipped in the synagogue, and was called "a child of Abraham," and Lazarus was a familiar object to him—had been living in close juxtaposition with him—lying daily at his gate, where he had touched him, going in and out a hundred times. Abraham and Lazarus! Oh yes, these both, he was well acquainted and nearly connected with; but *now* he discerns that both are immeasurably divided from him, and he from them; and that being what he was, contact with them, approach to them, was impossible. Now he discerns something more real and essential, more radical and profound, than neighbourhood, and descent, than physical contiguity or religious name—something which in spite of these, renders him a stranger and a foreigner to Abraham and Lazarus, and they to him; so that it was as though an impassable gulf yawned between them. The whole aspect of the human scene is altered for him: he perceives that the true status and situation of men is determined, not by their learning or their ignorance, their wealth or their poverty, their external association or privileges, but by their moral life and being; that the wrong and false heart excludes them from the circle of the right and the true, however they may *appear* to belong to it, or to be included within it; he is realising, to his mourning and lamentation and woe, the fundamentalness of spiritual affinity, and

the excommunications which it causes, the stern and terrible divisions which it makes; *he*, lately bound in servile bondage to flesh and sense, *he* is waking with many a gasp and groan to the *supremacy of the spiritual*; and how hopeful and blessed the waking, though it be never so painful. This is what numbers want to feel for their salvation, and with the feeling of which their salvation may be said to be begun.

We come now, it seems to me, in conclusion, to the beautiful firstfruits of the opening of Dives' eyes in torment, for mark what next follows in the scene before us. The vision of his actual self, the new and true estimate of things, the conviction and impression of the determining power of the spiritual,—these, which he has gained through the stripping of death, are found in the Lord's picture, issuing at length, in a remarkable change. He is shown us, rising out of the slum and corruption of his old selfishness, and recognising the might and majesty of divine truth; *first*, you observe,—acquiescing in and accepting his present state of suffering,—he begins to forget it and himself in thought, pitying and tender thought, for others; and he said: "I pray thee, father, send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he testify to them, that they come not to this place of torment." Why, what a transformation was here! Who could have anticipated that the selfish sensualist, described in the 9th and 10th verses of the chapter, would be seen ere long, pouring himself out in concern for others—seized and possessed

amid his anguish, with anxiety for the good of others—moved by the pains he was enduring, not to rave or complain, not to curse or growl, but to make efforts to save others. Better by far already, you will notice, than those redeemed saints, of whom we have sometimes heard, whose happiness is to be intensified by witnessing and watching the torments of the damned, *he* is burdened in his damnation, with yearnings for the deliverance of such as appear to him in danger of becoming damned.

But surely, my friends, if, according to Jesus Christ, a man in hell may come to be inspired with the missionary spirit, and to pray and intercede that his brethren on earth may not be lost,—surely, souls in heaven, will long to be able to rescue the lost, and will be constrained to attempt it. Can there possibly be less bowels of compassion there? And, then, what of God Himself, the all-merciful, and His infinite love?

But, *secondly*, you observe Dives is exhibited to us as learning by degrees to recognise and own the saving energy of divine truth. It is not learned all at once. There is some resistance and struggling for a season, but it *is* learned at last. “Abraham said, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them; and he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him [the voice of Abraham being but the symbol, the parable, of his own heaven-im-

pressed mind], If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." Then, *silence reigned*,—the silence of sweet consent,—and Dives disappears from our view, behind the veil which the Master's hand had lifted, that we might see—might see an example of spiritual awakening in hell, and its effects. The soul tormented with the revealings of eternity, disappears from our view rising into a new spirit,—a spirit of love,—and becoming submissive to the might of the truth of God ; and as we stand gazing, does it not occur to us that in the voice of Abraham, the Divine Seer and Teacher may have meant to intimate the influence of "the spirits of just men made perfect" in *guiding* the minds of those who are suffering beyond death, the torments of awakening ; in *helping* them to work their way up into life and peace ?







## THE ABOLITION OF DEATH

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2 TIMOTHY i. 10.

"Our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

"**T**HERE is no fireside, howsoe'er defended, but has one vacant chair." "The air is full of farewells to the dying and mournings for the dead." Death, Death everywhere. Not a sunrise that is not darkened by it, not a sunset that it does not sadden. Day after day it returns upon us, and fails not. Whatever else has passed or been extirpated, in the movement and progress of the ages, *it* abides, repeating itself incessantly, inexorably. Still, as ever since the world began, it continues to invade our circles, to violate our homes, to rob us of "the beloved, the true-hearted;" and we know that sooner or later we ourselves shall succumb to its touch. Death! It is a perpetual disturbance among us, is always remorselessly pursuing us, and we spend our lives in the shadow of it, even as our fathers did. Yet most true withal is the Apostle's assertion, that Christ has *abolished* it—for those at least who are able to see and receive Him, and the

revelation which He makes ;—yes, abolished it, notwithstanding that it goes on unchecked, that it riots and triumphs unabated. Nor is there any necessary contradiction here. We can understand, and have had experience of things being destroyed, without being put an end to—of things that are done away with while remaining, in the sense, viz., of ceasing to be, or to involve, what their name or their aspect indicated, what ignorance imputed to them, or superstition imagined concerning them ; in the sense of their losing the peculiar property or power, the peculiar character or significance, with which they were once invested, and which rendered them sources of misery and terror.

In these senses, how many things have been destroyed without being put an end to, have been done away with while remaining. They continue, but their whole meaning and expression, their whole figure and effect, have undergone a change. They are no longer the same that they used to be, but something altogether different : they have been abolished. There is the old wrinkled crone sitting on her lonely hearth, with the black cat in her lap—*the witch*, mighty to blast your cattle, or torment your child ; and there she sits still, yet education and enlightenment have abolished her, to the relief of thousands, whom she had held in bondage. Beneath the waxing of knowledge, the fearful witch has shrunk and softened to a mere age-worn, age-bent woman.

Here, again, is the ticking of the death-watch, distinct and solemn in the night stillness, to which

the nurse of the sick man listens with awe, as a mysterious prognostication of his approaching end ; and still is it heard, no less distinct and solemn than ever, in the chamber of the old house where the patient lies ; yet a little acquaintance with natural history has abolished it, and instead of an unearthly announcement of coming dissolution, we hear, without dread or tremor, nothing but the call to each other of certain insects in the woodwork. The tick of the death-watch is henceforth transformed into the harmless stroke of the *Annobium tessellatum*.

And how often has the same kind of abolition occurred in the child's bedroom, where a felt presence in the darkness has set the little heart beating violently with fright, and filled the little brain with terrible imaginings ; and when, in answer to the cry of alarm, the music of familiar tones out of the gloom, has taken from the felt presence all its horror, and made it quite another thing,—a thing to leap toward and embrace ; when, though the presence still remained, its whole import and influence were deliciously altered. As was the case, you will remember, with the Galilean fishermen in the midnight tempest ; to whom, at the sound of a voice, the form moving among the waves that *had been* a ghost, at which they cowered, *became* straightway the Christ, at whose feet they worshipped with joy.

Now, it is thus that the Lord Jesus has abolished death to those who accept Him. It does not cease to be their *lot*, or to eat into and encroach upon

their world, but it has ceased to be to them the arrest, the extinction of the man, which its name denotes, and its aspect appears to imply. The decay and destruction of the bodily life, called death, while continuing to take place without change or intermission, is no longer *death* in their thought and conviction ; is no longer in their thought and conviction a subsiding, and fading away into nothingness, but rather a passing on, and advance of the individual, from one state of things to another, from earthly conditions, to supernal. "There is no death," they cry, with happy assurance ; "what seems so, is transition." Neither is it any longer, as it has been, when the instincts of the mind have refused to admit the *reality* of the *apparent* termination, and have demanded and assumed irresistibly, survival beyond ;—neither is it any longer as it has been then—a crisis to be dreaded for the utter uncertainty, or for the possible disaster, of what it involved ; but instead, a gate of entrance upon further discipline and education, in order to finer growth, and nobler development ; a point of departure for other scenes, in which all shall be meant to serve the work of exalting and purifying. The old death of feared destruction, or of exit into darkness, is abolished, and they who believe in Christ, see *another thing* in the closing of the mortal existence, at which they are *not* dismayed nor afraid. Dying is no more dying, but a fresh and hopeful beginning.

And this abolition has been accomplished, the Apostle reminds us, by a bringing of "life and

immortality to light." The Lord Jesus is manifestation. He has come; *not creating* for us something around and outside, that had not been before, *but revealing* for us something that had been hidden before,—not to change any of the realities of the unseen, but to unveil them, as they are. His mission consists, and His redeeming power lies, in *shedding light*. Nothing is made new by Him but our vision, and from thence is salvation wrought. He takes us behind the veil, and showing us there the eternally true, to which we have been blind, *so* becomes our Saviour. We are converted and cleansed, by discerning through Him, the true.

Most blessed is the man who enables me to see aught of the beautiful and divine in God's universe, that I had not seen; who renders visible, curtained or clouded glories, and awakens within me some deeper conception, some juster and grander idea, of things. What increase of strength for duty, what elevation and purification of nature, what access of noble impulse, have we often derived through such an one. How he has helped and saved us, by correcting and enlarging our view. And supremely blessed is He, who alone among the sons of men, has unfolded the sublime secrets of our creaturely relations and destiny, and "brought life and immortality to light." To look upon His unfoldings, and be possessed with them, is to receive power to become the children of God. They raise us to a higher level of aspiration, and arm us for conflict with the might of sin.

This is redemption from the bondage and tyranny of evil forces, of grovelling tendencies, and unrighteous inclinations ; *to know in Him, the true.* Life and immortality, you see, according to the Apostle, are not the creation of Christ, but *are*, irrespectively and independently of Him. What He has done, has been, *not* to cause them to be, but to manifest them. They *were*, and He has flashed them upon our view, bringing down to us out of heaven the truth, that man is a living soul, over whom death has no power ; a living soul, surviving its destructions, and surviving to be made fairer and finer, with a beauty undefiled and incorruptible ; the truth that, happen what may, it is always *life*—more life, and purer—that lies before us, and to which we are being called and guided.

This truth has never been entirely dark to men. The divine instinct in them has dreamt of it, conjectured it, seen it dimly and confusedly afar off, or at least has yearned toward and hoped it. But what they have thus had some faint presentiment, some vague, wavering impression of, as they stood peering into the dense gloom that encircled them, *this* Christ has thrown light upon, has brought out into vivid clearness, has certified and assured. He has met the wondering surmisings, the groping speculations, the blind guesses of men, with a manifestation to them of “life and immortality ;” of life, still flowing on beyond the apparent termination of death, and flowing on beyond it to ultimate cleansing from all lingering elements of impurity, and ultimate deepening and broadening into

a river of holy being, reflecting perfectly the glory of the eternal God. *So* has He abolished death; for the sting of death is its aspect of finality, its seeming interruption and ruin of growing goodness and worth; its suggestions of hopelessness and despair, its blank and awful silence, in which are bred all manner of grovelling fears and terrors. *So* has He abolished the death that was only disappointment, failure, bitterness; changing it into a new and blessed thing, with His revealing of the unseen. The decay and destruction of the bodily life continues; but He shows us *that*, in the blaze of which, the depressing, disheartening fact wears quite another face. There is death still, and yet it is death no longer, but the shock and commotion of a fresh start, the breaking through into resurrection and enlargement, the crash of touching a greater beginning. "Some people think, weakly," it has been said, "that death is the only reality in life." Happy are they, and strong and inspired, whom the Divine Son has taught to see clearly, and to feel confidently, that "life is the true reality in death."

But *where* is the light which He is represented to have flung—to have flung upon the darkness of the grave? In other words, *how* has He given us the perception and assurance of life, and of life destined to acquire incorruptibility, and deliverance from all the infection of evil, in the veiled hereafter? "Through the Gospel," answers the Apostle. And let us seize the inner meaning of this term, which is too often lost sight of, or

allowed to escape ; which the hardening of the term, in the course of its age-long use, has tended to imprison and conceal. The Gospel of Christ is just the "good news" brought *by* Christ, and incarnated and embodied *in* Christ—His good news to us, concerning the unseen Power whom we intuitively recognise, and designate *God*; for is He not introduced upon the opening page of the New Testament Scriptures, as "Emanuel, God with us;" as the Only-begotten Son issuing from the bosom of the Infinite, to declare Him whom no man has beheld at any time? Was He not pointed out from the beginning by His inspired herald, as the promised One, whom God had sent to "speak the words of God;" and did not He Himself testify that He had been endowed and commissioned, *in order* that through Him, men might know the only true God?

Yes, He came revealing God. And what was the news—the good news, which He breathed of Him? What but the news of *His Fatherhood*?—God the Father,—*that* was His grand central announcement and exhibition,—that the invisible Might and Majesty, whom the world's conscience had guessed, and had imaged and worshipped in various forms, under various names, was the perfection of Fatherliness in His attitude toward and relations with us; "the righteous Father," with a righteous Father's interest in us, and love for us, and purpose and aim concerning us. *That* underlay and ran through all His teaching, received constant illustration and exemplification in the perfect *filial*

bearing which He constantly presented, and was manifested by *His own* tender zeal for men, and *His own* self-sacrifice for their highest good, who, as the Son, did "whatsoever He saw the Father do," and was but the echo and expression of the Father's will. The Gospel of Christ is the good news, that God the Omnipotent and Eternal *is the Father*. And need I stay to show how this *does* bring "life and immortality to light;" how this *does* disperse the darkness and terrors of the grave? Whether you are able to receive Christ, as the true and real manifestation of God,—whether, in spite of all apparent difficulties and contradictions, you are able to find and enjoy in Him, the Father, is another question. Some there are who cannot do so; but if you *can*, has He not abolished death for you? Has He not become to you the assurance of a hereafter—a hereafter full of life and glorious promise? God *being the Father*, is it not proven?

What could be more satisfactory and conclusive? Impossible, *then*, that death should be the destruction of any, or hopelessness and ruin for any;—impossible that I, a child of the Infinite, should belong wholly to the circle of the visible and material, with which at present I am bound up, and be doomed to perish in its dissolution and decay; that I, a child of the Infinite Perfection, should be interrupted and arrested in my development, by the failure of this earthly organism, and disappearance from these mundane environments; and should cease to grow any longer, toward the

image of the Divine ; that I, a child of the Infinite Righteousness and Love, however hitherto self-marred and perverted, am to be deprived of all further discipline and education, and abandoned for ever, to suffer uncared for, the bitter fruit of my doings, and to sink uncared for, into deeper and deeper degradation, *because* I am no more in the flesh. No, *God being the Father*, we are destined to live, notwithstanding death ; notwithstanding death, to go on and be finished—to go on progressively, toward our best aspirations, and our beautiful ideals—to go on, with a view to our purification and redemption. *Then*, there must be life always in store for us—life greatening and refining evermore, until thoroughly emancipated from all that is imperfect and defiled. *Then*, there must be life beyond, a life of opportunity and tuition, for the thousands of our race whom we see dying around us untaught and unsaved,—for the thousands who, born in sin, and nurtured in evil and misery, have had scarce a chance of culture or salvation here. *Then*, these are not lost in losing their mortal existence, but shall have their chance, and sooner or later their perfecting too, in ampler airs, and beneath higher skies.

O God, if Thou be our Father, and we Thy children, we shall not die, but live, and live to be raised to Thee ! “Our Saviour Jesus Christ has abolished death ; having brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel,”—*even* the good news of the Father.



## HOSEA'S ECLECTICISM.

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HOSEA xiv. 5, 6.

"I will be as the dew unto Israel : he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon."

**S**UCH is the strain, the gentle, cheerful strain, into which Hosea's fierce woes and warnings melt down at last, like the final drops of a fierce tempest shower which the sun has illumined, and the rainbow spans.

The good old prophet, from the commencement of his ministry in the reign of Jeroboam the son of Joash, had been living for the most part in evil times, during which he was made to see only visions of doom and judgment, and could do little else than either curse or remonstrate, admonish or threaten ; but now, after fifty years of almost continuous national corruption, a day of better things seemed to be dawning. The devout young prince Hezekiah, had just succeeded to the throne of Judah, and his earnest discountenancing of idolatry, and idolatrous customs ; his pious zeal for the law and worship of Jehovah, was full of promise ; so, forgetting to denounce and forebode,

as had been his long wont, the aged seer begins to bless and hope, and with a bright dream of the future, for the land, and the people over whom he yearned, sinks serenely to his rest.

His picture, you observe, of what their state would be, in returning to righteousness, and becoming reconciled to Heaven, is composed—curiously and daintily composed—of rich colours, drawn from various sources. To his glowing anticipation, no *single* image sufficed to represent the approaching glory. Every image that offered itself, however charming, however apt, so far as it went, was found *lacking* on some side, in some aspect. For an adequate portrayal of the brilliant prospect which his eyes beheld, he had to borrow and cull from this quarter and that—to gather and combine many things—selecting here a little, and there a little, and binding the medley together in one.

The splendour—the outward splendour—of the rapidly efflorescent lily, should be given them. (And have we not read of the exceeding majesty of the large “Hûleh-lily,” and how, with the meeting above of its three inner petals, it forms “a gorgeous canopy such as art never equalled, and king never sat under?”) But then the lily soon drooped and faded; no less fragile, than beautiful. To its beauty, therefore, must be joined the strength and stateliness—the deep-rooted strength and stateliness—of mighty Lebanon itself; the great white mountain rising massively from the ocean to the clouds, with its clustering villages, and

clinging forests, and hidden lairs of savage beasts—with its huge precipices, the vast furrows of its ravines, and grim gorges, and its outstretching promontories “that dip perpendicularly into the bosom of the Mediterranean;”—all the lily’s *fairness*, but in conjunction with Lebanon’s *abiding*. Yet these united, left something wanting still; there must be brought in, and added again—the ever-fruitful vitality, with the ever-abundant utility, of the famous olive-tree; that tree, “the most valuable species of property in the country, which contributed perhaps more than any other to the comfort and sustenance of the mass of the community; whose unctuous produce furnished a relish to the husbandman’s daily bread; with which the busy housewife was enabled to cook her dishes, and on which the family lamp depended for its replenishment;” that tree, moreover, whose fruit fails not, the greenness and fatness of whose old age, Hebrew prophets and bards loved to extol; which, “so long as a fragment of its ancient frame remains, and though dry almost as the post by the wayside, still continues to yield faithfully and freely its load of oily berries.” “His branches shall go, or move,” says Hosea;—it is the Hebrew word for marching, walking, flowing, and is thus used constantly in the Old Testament Scriptures: hence I fancy—the only instance in which it is applied to any phenomenon of the vegetable world—the allusion must be to the annual *shaking* of the boughs, to bring down the fruit; a great and notable operation in Syrian husbandry, “to which the

people are formally summoned every autumn, and which is carried on through all the groves at the same time, until a clean sweep has been made of the whole crop." "His branches shall sway to and fro, and his fruit shall be as the olive-tree"—not merely beautiful in appearance, and everlastingly enduring, but enduring in undecayed energy and animation, and for the perpetual good and blessing of the world. The olive, however, with all its tenacious vitality, and its prolonged profitableness, was less pleasant and attractive than many trees, at all events to the unfamiliar eye of strangers; it would not immediately charm, and take them captive; they would not be won in a moment, either by the loveliness of its aspect, or the sweetness of its perfume. What, then, should be chosen to supplement this deficiency, and to set forth Israel, as the inspired dreamer saw her destined to become, beneath the returning dew of the Lord; not alone unrivalled in splendour, and strong to abide, and undesiccated by age, and always genially and helpfully effluent, but, withal, irresistibly *inviting* and *attractive*? What should he choose to image the crown and completion of the whole?—what but "the smell of Lebanon?" "The smell of Lebanon;" and one thinks of the fig-trees decking the rocks, the vines trailing along the ledges, the terraces of mulberries, and the breezes that creep or fly, charged through the year with "the rich odours of myriad aromatic plants," and in the early summer, — while tempered by snow-clad peaks, and ice-cold streams,—laden with the mixed

fragrance of budding woods. Goodly, indeed, must be "the smell of Lebanon."

Well, so did the son of Beerī endeavour and contrive to make his picture perfect,—by resorting to many things, and picking out and bearing away from each, that which was greatest and best in it. Nothing was adopted *wholly*, since, however worthy in some respects, in some respect or other it had its blemish, or defect; and with nothing was he satisfied *alone*, since, however much it might comprehend of attractive feature or quality, there was that to be found elsewhere, which it possessed not; yet each supplied him with something of value, *peculiar* to itself. He took from the lily the exquisite beauty of its blossoming, but would not have its frailty; he seized upon the mountain's settled and unassailable stateliness, but then passed on to appropriate, in addition, the liveliness and lasting fecundity of the olive; while the unwinsome aspect and unsavoury odour of the latter he rejects, to return upon Lebanon, for its wealth of alluring perfume. And it is his eclecticism here, that I find inviting and suggestive; his free flitting from object to object, in order to collect materials for an image of perfection—not looking for it immediately in any one object that presents itself, but patiently waiting to have it constructed out of gracious or goodly parts, contributed by many objects, none of which were *entirely* satisfactory by themselves.

It reminds me, of what we need to recognise and act upon, both in the intercourse of life, and

in the pursuit of truth. Goodness and badness, strength and weakness, the great and the little in man, are not separated for us, so that in *these* individual microcosms we may seek the one, and in *those*, the other. On the contrary, the one is never to be found altogether without the other; they exist around us only in a mixed state; it is "beauty and the beast" always—beauty, flawed always with some traces of the beast, and the beast mitigated always with some touch of beauty. No man is worth accepting wholly, and every man has a grace and glory of his own that is worth searching out. "But who are they who would think otherwise?" you ask. "This is no discovery." True; yet it would be a sweet discovery to find you habitually recognising and acting upon it.

See, on the one hand, how we renounce and shut ourselves up from canine, snarling, disagreeable people, or from people who in some particular displease, offend, repel us; avoiding them, abandoning them, as though there were no lingering lines of beauty in them, with which to cultivate acquaintance; lines of beauty supplementing defect, or correcting faultiness of our own, perhaps.

Then see, on the other hand, our tendency to hero-worship; to insulate, and set up on high, and warn off criticism from the man, who has shown himself grand and supreme in some two or three, or perhaps in a single quality; how we foolishly assume him to be equally grand and supreme all round, on all sides; foolishly expect that it will turn out to be so, and then are foolishly astonished and

mortified, and may be, rather indignant, with the indignation of persons who fancy themselves taken in and deceived, when, in the course of time, and with a more intimate knowledge of our adored one, we learn that he is not grand and supreme in everything; that he has here and there his deficiencies and infirmities; nay, that in some respects meaner men are superior to him. Why is it that popular idols have come so often, after receiving much incense, to be not merely forsaken, but actually kicked and maltreated by their quondam votaries? In numerous instances, the secret of the revulsion lies in the fact that the stupid crowd, whom some point of real pre-eminence in them had deservedly attracted, began at once to impute to them corresponding pre-eminence in all points, and grew disgusted as it gradually became apparent, that in most other points, they were not above the level of ordinary men—in one or two points, perhaps, sadly inferior.

We *do* act frequently, either as if the olive, being found unattractive, were straightway to be rejected, or as if, because the lily is beautiful, the lily must be perfect; instead of looking behind the unattractiveness of the former, to gather its serviceable berries, and consenting, while embracing the beauty of the latter, to look somewhere else, for stateliness and strength. What is needed is, that we should be more ready and quick to discern the special grace, and the consequent essentialness, of every unit in the crowd, and less ready and quick to *confine* ourselves to any.

Ah! if we *could* fulfil ourselves, or our friends, by culling from this person and that, those qualities in which we are wanting; by taking to us and incorporating within us an excellence here, a virtue there, and free from the parasitical defect that probably adheres to each, with the abating wick that grows and rises in the flame of them, eliminated, or with the shadow that is flung from them, cut off and left behind; by gathering into and uniting in us something of *all* temperaments, and something of *all* traits, without any of their drawbacks or exaggerations; the buoyancy of the sanguine, without their inconstancy and impulsiveness; the repose and self-possession of the phlegmatic, without their coldness or sluggishness; the sensitiveness of the nervous, without their irritability or melancholy; the enthusiasm of this man, apart from his one-sidedness and bigotry, with the caution of that, disengaged from his scepticism and suspiciousness. What a man we could compose, were it possible to throw the human family into a sleep, and while they slumbered, to go to and fro among them, rifling the best of their best, choosing out everything beautiful in mind and heart, severed from every accompanying deformity, from every lurking blemish; for the perfect man *is* there,—in pieces, and broken fragments, distributed through the crowd, and confusedly mixed with lumps of alloy—the perfect man *is* there, but not to be brought together, and expressed in any single personality.

Is there, however, no way in which we can severally approximate toward some possession of him?—no way in which we can severally approximate toward securing the benefit and use of him? Yes, there is, viz. by *association*—by associating largely and widely with one another; uniting, in work, study, and intercourse, what we each have—our various distinctive characters and attainments. Thus might we neutralise often, in a measure, our different imperfections, false tendencies, and superfluities of naughtiness, our different evil excesses and defects. Certain vices, or vicious tendencies, when existing together in the same individual, are mutually neutralised by the conjunction, as ambition and indolence, avarice and vanity; the contact of these opposites, serves at least, to correct and modify each, and the man is in *both* evil directions, somewhat toned down and restrained. So also, the association of men is useful frequently, for counteracting, more or less, their opposed wrong impulses or infirmities, and the state of society is, on the whole, the better for it; nay, a positive good is often evolved.

For instance, here, in the political realm, is the feverish haste and impatience of the ardent progressionist, side by side with the persistent reluctance of the contented conservative; and these acting on each other, you have, as the result, a third thing, viz. forward movement, at once earnestly sober and guardedly earnest, *safe*, and *sure*. And then, by consorting together, not only are

many differences, and many tendencies, advantageously controlled and chastened, but we are helped and stimulated by one another's distinctive superiorities: we obtain the benefit of one another's peculiar excellencies. There are prominences *here* that fit into concavities *there*; a profusion of colour there that makes up for deficiency of colour here; he who is chiefly skilful in devising, is supplemented by him who is chiefly strong in execution, and something always defective in connection with the richest gift, is met and ministered to by something of gift always, in connection with the largest defect. If we cannot unite in ourselves personally, the beauty of the lily, the stability of the mountain, the tenacious vigour of the olive, and the smell of Lebanon, yet we may *come* to them all, and *receive* of all, through association.

Hence, the value of Church fellowship, in which each contributes the *peculium* of his own specific Christian character and development, of his own specific Christian form and force, whatever they may be, while each finds a *peculium* other than his own, that is in some way more or less serviceable to him; and should he encounter in the midst, shortcomings and failings that are disagreeable or painful, and contact with which he would rather have been spared, he is assisted to bear with these patiently, through the discovery of certain answering defects in himself; a discovery made to him by the vivid display in some, of the opposite virtues.

Hence again, the value of having different

*views* comprehended in the range of our religious intercourse; of living in communion with different religious impressions and conceptions; for the same divine reality upon which a multitude of devout and earnest souls are brooding, is in its divineness, many-sided and manifold—too many-sided and manifold to be caught, except only partially and imperfectly, by any single soul of the number. No mind, or little group of minds contemplating it, can possibly see *all* that there *is* to be seen in it. It is too great and wide, too much of the infinite belongs to it; each at the most, does but catch glimpses and “broken lights,” according to the kind of vision applied; its communication in each case, depending upon the make and shape of those who look, upon whence they have come, and what they are, and rounding itself to *that*, as the expanse of the sky to the earth. Thus many minds and many groups of minds are wanted, in order that it may give itself, with anything approaching to completeness; and it is only in the confluence and free mingling of *all* minds, with the several and various impressions they have received, and by the resulting gradual purification and dovetailing of these,—it is only thus, that a comparatively full and perfect view of the divine reality will be likely to be gained. In the variety of views there will be, of course, numerous errors and mistakes; but as no one view will comprise the whole truth, or indeed any part of the truth, without some inferior mixture, some shadow of the seer; so also no

view, however false and faulty, will be wholly without truth, without some element of truth, some hint or suggestion at least, with which the better, the more largely true views, may possibly be corrected or widened ; and in the free contact and collision of the variety, whatever may be fanciful or foolish, weak or fallacious on all sides, tends to get rubbed off and sifted out, while the morsels of truth on all sides, come forth into more and more clearness, and tend gradually to flow together, according to their relations, and unite.

What we need in order to a growing discernment of the universe of spiritual truth among us, is *comprehension*—the comprehension within our circle of intercourse, as of many visions and impressions of earnest brother-souls as possible. So, and so only, are we in the way toward circumscribing the great object, the vast orb, that we severally look up to and contemplate. The curse of the past, has been the tendency of every little group,—seeing the same thing and thinking alike,—to retire into themselves with their supposed treasure of the whole truth, perfectly indifferent to what others might be seeing and thinking, except, indeed, to anathematise it ; and then, as gradually, in every little group slight differences of seeing and thinking began to develop—which would be the case invariably, wherever there was *life*—each rising difference was either straightway cast out, or straightway separated, to form yet another group, shut up to itself like “a garden walled around.” It is not thus that we shall ever

come into the fulness of light and knowledge, but rather, by welcoming whatever diversity of view may prevail among us, as a *reason* for remaining side by side, and cultivating close acquaintance with one another.

Let us be for *comprehension*, hearkening to all, exchanging with all, and expecting and aiming to learn from all who worship and love; and, instead of shrinking from, or being dismayed at, the differences of religious conception and theological thought in our midst, let us dread being left without them, for to live is to vary; in death only is sameness. Where the dew of the Lord is wanting, there surely will be uniformity—the uniformity of emptiness and barrenness; but where the dew falls, there will be variety—the blossoming of the lily, the root striking of the mountain forests, the dusky olive's branch, and Lebanon's smell.

So long as we feel no *interest* in truth, care not to think about it or study it at all, and are content with going through the customary forms, and repeating the customary words on Sundays,—so long, we are all *agreed*, and there is no collision, because nothing moves; but let there be inspiring us a spirit of devotion to truth, of earnest thought and inquiry, and then we have, infallibly, differing ideas and impressions, with heterodoxies and heresies. It must be so, with a number of live individual souls on the one hand, and on the other, the great world of divine realities. And whatever the temporary confusion and disturbance may be, it is always the true and living way into some further view, and some larger inheritance of that world.





## SLEEPING TO SEE.

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GENESIS xxviii. 11, 16.

“And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. . . . And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not.”

**ONE** *may* be too wide-awake to see. There *are* things that are hidden from us, until we lie down to sleep. Only then do the heavens open and the angels of the Lord disclose themselves.

Jacob came to this place, anxious, excited, feverish; he had fled from home in haste and fear, his mind was full of uneasy, troubled thought—thought about his safety, his prospects, the scene in which he had lately been an actor, the journey, the long journey of four hundred miles across the country, which painful circumstances had driven him to undertake; and the place was no more to him than what it looked—a bare and empty desert. It gave no hint, breathed no suggestion of the Divine; the Eternal was there already, but he was blind and insensible to the great reality; no strange tremor crept

through his breast, no palpitating awe, while arranging the stones for the pillow ; as when we wake in the darkness, with a vague mysterious sense of something at our side, of a Presence whose form eludes us.

It does not follow that God is not, because we cannot discern Him, because we are not aware of Him. "You are unable to show Him to me," says one, with an air of having settled thus the question of His existence ; but all that is settled, is that the speaker is unable to see. There are men to whom the sun is invisible, yet it shines, bathing their own garments, touching and illumining their own faces ; and there are men to whom the voices of the birds are inaudible, yet the summer branches over their heads, and the woods through which they walk, are resonant with them ; and there are those, doubtless, in whom the faculty that comprehends God is wanting or impaired, who either were *born* defective, or have *become* so. It is not that He of whom the many are conscious, is an illusion, a dream, but that *they*, the few, are deficient in the organ of perception. How often have we all gone, beholding nothing, where, after a while, marvels or beauties have revealed themselves. How often have things that *were*, remained concealed from us, to break upon us at length like objects out of a mist ; all at once we have descried, what had already *been*, only that from day to day our eyes had been holden, and we saw it not. And are there not actualities that still escape us, "chariots and horses of fire

round about the mount," that are still undiscernible, waiting only for the requisite condition within us, to become apparent?

Little do we dream of the veiled wonders and splendours amidst which we move. The *scene* answers and shapes itself to our *being*; expands or contracts, sublimates or sinks, according to *our* determination. What powers we are, whether for creation or destruction; now filling the desert with angels, and now resolving the angels into dust. A dull, prosaic soul comes to a poem, and straightway the poetry disappears. A poet looks upon some ordinary incident, some common familiar sight, and straightway the whole is tinged and coloured with hues of poetry. Beneath the glance of one man, with his coarse, vulgar, sinister mind, the noblest deed loses all its grace and nobility; beneath the touch of another, through the spirit which he brings to it, the lowest drudgery is made divine. There is nothing, however sordid, that we cannot transfigure until it shines like the face of Christ on Tabor; and nothing, however celestial, that we cannot reduce to mere earth and clay.

To Jacob's mental fret and commotion, the wilderness where God brooded, was only a wilderness, and nothing more. God was in the place, and he knew it not; but when he had collected his stones and prepared his bed, *he lay down and slept*. Gradually slumber stole upon him, and folded him in her arms; gradually the fever cooled, the excitement subsided, the

anxiety ceased; he grew tranquil and still; he lost himself—the flurried, heated, uneasy self that he had brought with him from Beersheba; and *while he slept*, the hitherto unperceived Eternal came out softly, largely, above, and around him. He saw His glory and heard His voice; the solitary waste trembled, flushed, overflowed with His presence. Heaven and earth met and mingled. It was God—God filling and pervading the entire scene. In *sleep* the wayfarer's eyes were opened—sleep showed him, what awake, he could not see.

Now there is something surely that we may read in this,—this old story of how the Lord waited to reveal Himself until the Patriarch slumbered; of how, in his slumber, he discerned a secret, of which before he had been unconscious, the secret of the Lord's nearness. It clothes surely something of truth for us, hides within it a message and a lesson for us, viz. that there are things which we need to sleep in order to see. Good it is, exceedingly good, to be wide-awake, with senses all alert, and mind all present; to be "all there"—as men are wont to say—in moments of demand or difficulty, when work has to be done, or a problem to be grappled, with nothing of us vagrant, loitering, or dormant; although, by the way, there are senses, in which we are never completely possessed of ourselves. No man is ever completely awake; *something* in him, always sleeps. At his worst and lowest, some element of good; at his best and highest, some tendency to evil.

How much lies lulled within us at times, when we are most intensely concentrated and alive. See the *conscience* that begins to stir in him who has been sharply, seriously intent upon the prosecution of a dishonest scheme,—as he goes home from the city into the hush and relaxation of evening—the conscience that had slumbered profoundly, while he was absorbed with his conventionally-termed “smart practice,” and that *now* shakes itself and comes forth, making disturbance and disquiet in his breast. Or see one pursuing eagerly his dear ends, following hard after fortune or fame, after some coveted gain or possession. Yet all mustered, and devoted as he is to the pursuit, the *whole* man is not present and effluent there. When at length he has achieved his object, and won his desire, then,—in the gradual satiety, and discontent, and further craving that seizes him,—then, awakes the immortal soul that slumbered, and that cannot be filled with the “husks” of worldly fortune or fame.

How *surprised* we often are at what appears in us. We have fancied that we knew ourselves perfectly; but it seems that we did not. Here is something that we had never suspected, that we had never dreamt of encountering—a feature; ugliness or beauty, that we could not have believed we included. One feels almost as might a paterfamilias who supposed that he knew all his household, on seeing a stranger come down in the morning, and take his place at the breakfast-table with an air of belonging to the family. “What do you do here?” we are inclined to say. Oh! the devilishness, the meanness,

the prejudice, the blood of the beast, that is frequently *latent* in men, behind such different manifestations—hidden volcanic fires beneath verdant plains, and vine-clad hills: and, on the contrary, the nobleness, the grace, the strength, they frequently hide, not only from others, but from themselves, until something happens to educe it; and on what apparent *accidents* it hangs, that this or that, in me, is elucidated and betrayed.

How constantly people must be dying, and passing away, without having shown, or seen *all* that is shut up within them. If the "all" in any case, could be at any time, simultaneously drawn out and displayed, imagine the scene of contradiction and confusion that would present itself—the violent opposites, the jarring discords, the clashings of heaven and hell. But there is never a moment in our history in which the entire round of us, is awake. We come forth piecemeal, in bits and morsels—now one side of us, and now another; and it is comforting to feel and be assured in many instances, that the man is *not* wholly there, that there is *something* lying behind, and slumbering in him, better than that—a spirit altogether superior, or germs and rudiments at least, of finer growth; as it was with Jacob, who, when he awoke out of sleep, saying, "If God be with me, and give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, *then* shall the Lord be my God,"—who, when he awoke out of sleep, vowing thus, was *not* completely awake. Down in the depths of him, unconsciously to him-

self, lay the elements of a Jacob, less coarsely Jewish—of a larger, healthier, loftier Jacob yet to be developed under the application of various divine discipline, and by means of enlarged intercourse with men and things.

But to return to our point, viz. the suggestion of the story in the text, that we may be too wakeful for vision, that we need sometimes to sleep, in order to see. Well, have not many of us experienced on occasions, during our *literal* slumbers, disentanglings for us of what before had been hopelessly entangled—elucidations to us of what before had baffled and perplexed? Have we not gone to bed at seasons, weary and exhausted with striving in vain to make it out, and awoke saying, “While I slept it came to me?” How often, at all events, has it been *thus*: you have been working and worrying long over a subject, until at last you were in a state of fever and ferment, vexation and anxiety, which tended more and more to obscure it, to create a haze, to exhale a mist about it; you felt that your very effort was hindering, that, instead of approaching any nearer to an understanding of the matter, you were rather receding from it, and that the longer you continued wrestling with it, the worse it would be. So you gave up the struggle and turned away, allowing the tense strained mind to unbend, to relax, allowing it to sink into repose, to float and drift; and then presently, *while you slept*, the whole thing grew clear to you, you saw it at once: true, you would never have seen it without the previous

labour, at all, yet the labour went on until it became an actual impediment to vision, and it was only by ceasing from the labour at length, that you were enabled to see; you were too hotly awake; revelation waited for the strained eyes to droop and close.

Or again, with regard to a series of great events—events that have deeply moved the hearts of men, that have roused and thrilled society—some time must be suffered to elapse, before an attempt is made to write a history of them—a history at least, that shall aim, not merely to narrate, but to portray and expound; otherwise, it will be comparatively worthless—partial and prejudiced—undiscerning and indiscriminating. For a while, there is not sufficient repose and calm to admit of a thoroughly true, and comprehensive view being taken of the period, or to enable a right estimate of it to be formed; there is at first, too much blinding heat and excitement. One must *sleep* in relation to events that have mightily stirred and affected him, before he will be capable of weighing them correctly, before it will be possible to see them in their actual magnitude, in their real bearings and proportions; the passion they have roused must be left to cool, the commotion and agitation to subside; then only can they be studied to advantage, or accurately understood and appreciated. Our judgment of things is often false and mistaken; we often fail to catch their full significance, and err in interpreting them, because our review of them is *premature*, because we have

not yet passed far enough away from them, are not yet emotionally allayed and subdued enough in reference to them.

But, further, is there not a sense in which it may be said with truth, that were we less wakeful, more of God and spiritual realities might be unveiled to us; that sleep is wanted to give us closer and deeper vision of these; sleep for instance, in relation to the constant rush and hurry of our lives, the constant outward pressure and engagement? We are always *doing*—too much so for finest being; are always *striving*—too much so for highest attaining. There is no life, indeed, no healthy and wholesome soul life, without the bustle and swelter of action; and many a man is acquiring and growing more divinely in his daily buying and selling and manifold mundane anxieties and labours, than others in their cloistered stillness and seclusion, and amid the quiet of meditative days. But are we not, as a rule, too unbrokenly busy, for ever eagerly hearing something, reading something, pursuing something, inquiring into something; rarely resting from the strain of desire and enterprise, to bathe in the waters of leisurely thought; rarely pausing to breathe and inspire at large; rarely allowing ourselves the mental hush and silence, in which the finest sounds may be heard, and that which is hidden be able to come forth and show itself; as when the noisy merry-makers or travellers have passed, and all is profoundly still again, the hidden life of the forest steals out, and many a beautiful timid creature,

whose adjacency had not been suspected, glides into the open from behind the trees?

One of the great wants of the present day, in order to spiritual vision, is, I fancy, *more sleep*—more sleep from the whirl of occupation—and sleep, further, in relation to the fret of selfish spiritual anxiety. Nothing, believe me, operates to shut us out from the enjoyment of God and the invisible, like this. We do not see and feel as we might and should, because our religion consists too much in solicitude to *get*, is too full of the thought of acquisition or reward; it is continually, “The Lord, the Father of *mercies*,” rather than, “The Lord, the Father of *glory*,” “The Lord, the Giver, the Benefactor, the Redeemer,” rather than, “The Lord, the transcendent Being, the infinite Splendour and Perfection;” it is continually the hope of heaven or the dread of hell, rather than sweet content in righteousness; the craving to be loved, rather than rest in loving; while worship resolves with us almost entirely into prayer, the prayer that *asks* for things. Thus it is that we are dulled and blunted in our perception of the Divine,—beneath the everlasting burden of *our* welfare, *our* blessedness, *our* growth and progress. The place is so choked with self-regard and self-concern, that God has no room in which to shine forth and display Himself, and the ascending and descending of the holy angels is hidden. We require to sleep; *to sleep from ourselves*, before the heavens can open upon us freely, and richly flow around us.

Escape from yourselves, my brothers, if you want

to see the Lord; be a little less absorbed in seeking your own, a little less engaged in watching or fondling, in weeping over or wondering about your own, leave it, forget it, and when the self-tide gathers strong and rises high, and will not be restrained, make for it some water-course of human sympathy or charity, into which it may run; get rid of it by letting it out to mix with, and be swallowed in the flood of other men's interests and needs. In illustration of which method of self-losing, take the substance of a beautiful legend of the East, which I came across in my reading lately. There visited Buddha one day, a woman who had lost her only child. Wild with grief, she implored the prophet to give back her little one to life. After looking at her a long while tenderly, he said, "Go, my daughter, bring me a mustard-seed from a house into which Death has never entered, and I will do as thou desirest." The woman at once began her search. She went from dwelling to dwelling, saying, "Grant me, kind folk, a mustard-seed, for the prophet to revive my child." And when they had granted her what she requested, she inquired, "Are you all *here* around the hearth,—father, mother, children,—none missing?" But the people invariably shook their heads with sighs and looks of sadness; and far and wide as she wandered, there was always some vacant seat by the hearth. Then gradually, as she passed on, the waves of her grief subsided before the spectacle of sorrow everywhere, and her heart.

ceasing to be occupied with her own selfish pang, flowed out in strong yearnings of sympathy with the universal suffering; tears of anguish softened into tears of pity; passion melted away in compassion; she forgot herself in the general interest, and found redemption in redeeming.





## A TEMPTATION TO MURDER.

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GENESIS xxii. 10.

"And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son."

**I**T was a temptation that had come upon him; the thought that it was the best thing to do, and that he was bound to do it; that it was the right thing to do, and that he was called to do it; and after brooding over it intensely for several days, here he is at length, irresistibly drawn to essay the commission of the dreadful deed, to take the knife for the purpose of slaying his son—the very same thing which happens not unfrequently now-a-days.

We have heard of modern fathers—alas, we have known modern fathers—who have been tempted to kill their children; to whom the idea has presented itself as a good and worthy idea, and has returned, to be harboured and cherished, again and again, becoming each time more importunate, more masterful, until at last they have been driven helplessly before it, like a stray leaf before the wind.

But are, then, such men and the Patriarch Abraham to be classed together? No. Alike though they are in their false mental impression

and their mad resolve, in that which lies behind these, they are radically diverse; united though they are in their conclusion and determination, in their starting-point of moral condition and feeling, they stand widely asunder. Here, instead of resemblance, is direct and entire contrast. In the case of the former, for the most part, the impulse to murder has its ultimate root in *distrust* of God. Thus, while toiling and struggling, say, for the welfare of the children whom they love, they encounter disappointment and failure, and the outlook for their dear ones grows darker and darker, nothing but poverty and misery appear to be in store for them; and because they are unable to lean upon the great Father, to believe that those over whom they yearn are in *His* hands whatever may befall; they are unable to continue the toil and the struggle, and give themselves up to dwell despairingly upon the evil that threatens, until, as it greatens beneath their gaze, they seem to hear a voice, waxing ever louder and clearer: "Save them; you can only save them, you are required to save them, by sending them back to God, through the gates of death; take now your son, your daughter, whom you love, and offer them up." It is out of distrust of the great Father, that the terrible idea is begotten.

But with the Old Testament Patriarch, the idea had quite a different genesis; he was led into the temptation by his anxiety to maintain *trust* in God, by his holy fear of declining from it. He had been, you know, from the beginning, pre-

eminently a man of faith ; had left country and kindred under the inspiration of faith in the unseen Divine Being, to the conception of whom his soul had risen in Ur of the Chaldees. Then, on finding himself beyond the river, among the pastures of Canaan, it was borne in upon him as an assurance from Heaven, that he was to possess the land, and to be the father of many nations ; and he believed and doubted not, though he remained childless. Then at length a child came, whom he welcomed with joy, as the pledge and earnest of the fulfilment of the word of the Lord concerning the future inheritance on which he had never ceased to rest with implicit confidence ; a child, in whom he saw with satisfaction, the means of its accomplishment.

And now, we can understand that the natural tendency would be to begin to repose upon Isaac, rather than, as he had hitherto done, upon the Divine promise ; to transfer his hold from *it* to *him*. Here was the precious gift through which the future,—in which he had believed until now, simply because God had whispered it to his heart,—here was the precious gift through which it should be brought to pass, and which it behoved him therefore, to guard carefully. How dear would the lad become to him ; how tenderly watchful of him would he be ; how nervous and anxious often, lest anything should happen to him ! Isaac, doubtless, in childhood and youth, had his threatening sicknesses, and with what intense solicitude would Abraham sit beside him, fearful of losing him,

feeling that if *he* were to go, all the prospect that had opened, would go with him.

But we can well understand also, that a man like the Patriarch, to whom trust in God had been his life and strength, who had found in it, during years of varied experience, the secret of peace, and the birth of righteousness,—we can well understand that such a man as he, would awake, after a while, to the troubled consciousness that it was not with him as in former days; that he had sunk below the serene summit on which he once stood; that Isaac was threatening to be to him in the place of the Lord. Something had occurred probably—perhaps some illness of the lad—to reveal to him startlingly, how far he was from the old simple trust, and how near to making his son his main ground of assurance; and then he would begin to say: “This must not be; I must go back to believing in God. Instead of fretting and worrying lest Isaac should be taken from me, as though all depended upon his continuance, I ought to be ready and willing at any moment to see him taken, knowing that Jehovah and His word would still abide. Oh! let me not depart from my trust in Him, to cling to His gift. I will not; Isaac shall no longer intervene to separate me from Him. Yet, should I be able to give him up if it were demanded of me? Lord, I would fain show Thee that I could do it.” And then, brooding thus from day to day, with vehement longings to rest wholly in God, and to *know* that he was really so resting; he comes to feel at length, as though a divine

voice were calling him to prove himself, by voluntarily *renouncing* the son that had been given him. "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him up." Yes, that is what he must do; that is what Heaven would have him do—trust in God, even to the extent of sending back to Him the precious thing without which, to all human appearance, the divine promise concerning the future can never be realised.

Poor Abraham! driven wild, fevered into madness, through the fervour of his desire to maintain trust in the great Father, even as, among us, men *are* sometimes, by the lurid burning of *distrust*. Thus you see how the same temptation may arise out of quite opposite moral feelings; how the same wrong impulse and act may have its source in one instance, in a noble and worthy sentiment; in another, in an ignoble and unworthy; in one instance, in a beautiful spirit of faith, in another, in an ugly spirit of unbelief. So it is; we are strange creatures, needing to be saved often from the good that is in us, no less than from the evil; needing to set a watch upon our best aspirations and our divinest affections, lest *they* should sweep us into wrongness and sin, no less than to guard and resist our grovelling tendencies, and false leanings. A good tree *may* yield corrupt fruit, is as true as the words, "a good tree *cannot* yield corrupt fruit;" since, while out of that which is purely good, only good can come; there is that mixed with, or hanging about all our goodness, through the action of which its fruit may be

blighted, or perverted in the bud. There may be, for example, a weak or distempered brain, for which some lofty enthusiasm, some great thought and purpose of the consecrated heart, is too much, and through which the latter becomes wrung and spoiled. Our sweet trees of grace within us, often get twisted out of shape—perhaps at last into something positively hideous and revolting—by reason of bulging walls, or inadequate adjuncts. There was a weakness, a defect, somewhere in Abraham, that caused him to lose his balance under the burden of his *holy* shrinking from unbelief, and his *holy* aspiration after perfect trust; and that made it *look* right to him to do, what others have been blindly urged to do, through distrust and unbelief.

But did not *God* tempt him? you say. Is it not so recorded? Yes, undoubtedly; in the Patriarch's mind it *was* God tempting him. The narrative is a narrative of what took place *in his mind*; the whole is a subjective scene, portrayed objectively. To Abraham's hearing, God was saying, "Sacrifice thy son;" otherwise, he would not have attempted it; and truly God was in it, as He is in all things—was in it, for the exercise and education of His servant. The thought that first stirred in the heart of the latter, that he ought to trust in the Lord, even to being ready and willing to lose Isaac—the Isaac in whom his hopes were bound up—*this* was a divine thought, a true, high, noble thought, such as the Hebrews would call, according to their habit, "a thought of God."

But *this* was met by his own weakness and ignorance, together with some effect in him probably, of the practice of offering human sacrifices among the Canaanites, which suggested the cultivation and manifestation of trust, by immolating his son ; and herein lay the trial, the divine trial, for his exercise and education. God would teach him to be full of trust ; to learn to depend wholly upon Him, and to be able to surrender to Him his most precious things, were it necessary ; and at the same time, to work his way out of the muddle of the false impression, that it was necessary for him, in order to the exemplification of perfect trust, to lift his hand against the life of his son.

Here was the trial with which he was tried—not the conviction that he must slay Isaac, but, while feeling deeply that he ought so to trust in Jehovah as to be *able* to let him go, yet, to conquer and triumph over the idea that he was bound by his own act to get rid of him ; to rise clear above *that*, saved from accomplishing the murder to which the duty of trust, seemed in his confusion and blindness to be urging him ; and with the spirit of trust established and deepened within him. God did not tempt him to slay, although for a time he imagined that He did ; yet God *was* in the trial—the trial, viz. of maintaining and fostering trust, *without* allowing it to lead him by perversion, into crime ; for a crime it would have been to slay his son, and therefore it is impossible that *He* should have suggested it, who “cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth to evil any man.” Of

the thought, "Go and kill Isaac," *He* could not be the author; He *was* the author of the thought, "Trust Me, even though Isaac should die; depend not on him, but on Me, even with a dependence enabling you to lose him without despairing or misgiving;" and *that*, in contact with Abraham's weakness and superstition, precipitated the thought, "Let me pursue and evidence my trust, by sacrificing him;" which was the thought he had to battle with and overcome, while keeping and cherishing the former.

And such is more or less our life-trial—to cultivate trust in God, and other good things, without allowing them to run into evil—without suffering them to ferment toward corruption; to carry our graces safely through and above all the weakness and folly and disorder in us, that lies around them, and tends to mix with and mar them; to learn to be pure and self-denying, high-principled and devout, with *no less* of humanity, or natural fluency and sweetness; to come out purged and sanctified at last, with no incidentally contracted *twist* or *narrowness*.

And now observe, how the narrative itself declares, that it was *not* God who tempted the Patriarch to slay his son, although it begins by representing Him as doing so, in accordance with the Patriarch's impression at the time; since it ends, by showing God saying at length to the heart of Abraham with irresistible force,—just as he was on the point of yielding to the impulse which he had fancied was divine,

—"Stop, it cannot be; you must not lay a hand upon the lad, or do aught of harm to him; you are mistaken, you are deceived; this is not what I desire; but to have you so filled with the spirit of trust in Me, as to be capable of parting with your son; and this I am satisfied to know *is* the case. I have seen you,—who were in danger for a while, of putting Isaac in my place,—I have seen you recovering yourself, and returning to your old simple faith in Me, and it pleases Me; but your intent to meddle with another's life, for the sake of evincing your trust, I deprecate and forbid." Now the Lord could not *contradict* Himself in the Patriarch's breast; commanding one day to kill, and another day crying, "Thou shalt not kill!" and the historian evidently means us to understand, that *the latter* was the true voice of God, contradicting and prevailing against the voice that had been *mistaken* for His; while he describes Abraham's triumph, as consisting in his emerging at last, out of the great darkness of confusion and suffering, with a perfected filial confidence, approved and accepted of Heaven, and with the temptation to kill, that had come upon him in striving for such confidence, utterly beaten back and vanquished.

*So* did he beat his music out; *so* did he learn to feel in the end, that while he was bound to trust, and must need trust, there was no necessity in order thereto, to make an offering of his son; nay, that it would have been a grievous sin to do so, and devilish *distrust*; as if the Lord could not

educate him into complete trust without his interfering with a crime, to help Him. And thus his trial may be said to have been fundamentally, a conflict between trust and distrust; the former saying, "You ought to be ready to *surrender* your beloved if required;" and the latter whispering, "You ought to *destroy* your beloved, lest peradventure, his presence should tend to wean your heart from trust;" until the slumbering sense of rightness awoke, and decided the day.

And mark, for a moment, in conclusion, the beautiful, and wonderfully inspired view of God which we have presented to us here, at the close of this ancient story. It exhibits Him, you perceive, as not only delivering His servant at length from the blindness and falseness of feeling into which he had fallen, and leading him forth to a high place of truth and light; but as penetrating and disengaging *the grace* in him, that lay behind *the wrongness*, which He was obliged to reprobate and condemn. "Abraham," He says in effect, "I must reject this sacrifice which you would offer Me; it is an offence to Me—I cannot bear it; you are altogether astray in attempting it; but I do not therefore reject *you*; nay, I smile upon you and embrace you, notwithstanding your murderous essay; for known and open to Me is the true yearning, the true aspiration and feeling, that throbs at the back of it all. I can see *that*—the sentiment of filial trust—the desire to rest in dependence and faith on Me; and that is sweet to Me; that I gather up and receive with joy, while repudiating

the thought of cruelty and crime that has fastened upon you, and mixed with it."

And Abraham said, "I will call the name of the place Jehovah-jireh"—the Lord *sees*. "Yes, truly *He sees*, dividing between the good spirit, and the evil form, between the pure intention, and the bad application, between the true motive of the heart, and the false conclusion of the weak brain; and He in mercy enables me at length, to see—to see clearly between the right and the wrong—to see out of my long confusion, what it is that the Lord requires of me, and to separate the devilish from the divine; in the mount of the Lord my eyes are opened."

And is not this just *our* God?—one who not only sets the lowly and honest soul, sooner or later, upon the summit of true vision, in the land of light; but who is ever *passing through* our grievous mistakes, and our faulty performances, to find and prize whatever of sincere motive, and lofty aim, and earnest struggle may be underlying them; who is ever understanding and approving the good thing that we want to be, however we may blunder and err in pursuing it; even as the mother does with some loving little one, who wants and means to help her, yet only manages to get in her way and upset things, and make a confusion; not spurning the child for the mischief which it makes, but tenderly recognising the sweet spirit of helpfulness that made it so mischievously active, and responding to *it*, praising *it*, and seeking

to instruct and direct *it*; for the sake of *it* forgiving all the rest.

Ah! and how much there may be in connection with our worst and "pitifulest" doings at times, which He sees to be good and precious, and worth seizing upon to educate and purify. A poor man, muddled with anxiety and care, as he broods over the poverty and wretchedness that threatens his children; is driven to save them by killing them. A horrible thing, we say, and traceable to a guilty distrust of God. Well, so it is; and yet does it not tell *also* of the yearnings of love—of the depth and tenderness of a spirit akin even to a spirit of self-sacrifice—and may we not conceive of Him, embracing it, in spite of the crime breeding distrust of Himself, and taking it up to cultivate into something higher and diviner, in the great hereafter? Oh yes, He is always noting and treasuring every bit of good that blushes amidst our badness; the painful mystery is, that He does not always enable those in whom the spirit of children breathes, to triumph down here, over the weakness and evil that often enter into conflict with it, but suffers them sometimes to prevail, even to present utter overthrow and ruin. Nevertheless, of this let us be sure, that nothing of good left in such, shall be lost, but shall be taken up by Him, to be saved through the fire, for future training and development.



## THE FOOLISH VIRGINS.

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MATTHEW xxv. 10.

"And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came ; and they that were ready went in with Him to the marriage : and the door was shut."

**I**N the concluding verses of the previous chapter,—upon the ground that the undoubted return of the Son of Man might occur at any moment,—Christ had sought to impress His disciples with the importance—the solemn importance—of being immediately ready ; of entering into the spirit, and assuming the duties, of members of the kingdom, at once, without the least halting ; in illustration of which, He described the fate of a certain evil servant, who, saying in his heart, " My lord delayeth his coming—there is plenty of time," resolved to indulge himself a while in some revelry, before buckling to work, and *so* was found unprepared,—the master flashing in upon him swiftly, suddenly, at an earlier hour than he had dreamed of, and cutting him off from his place in the household. Here, however, in the parable from which these words are quoted,—by the consideration that the undoubted return of the Son of

Man might be yet very distant, and have to be waited for much longer than was expected,—Christ seeks to impress His disciples with the importance—the solemn importance—of giving heed, when they have made themselves ready, to provide adequately for the *maintenance* of such a condition ; to adopt precautions, with the view of enabling them to abide in it without degeneracy or decline : in illustration of which, he depicts the bitter disappointment and loss of certain foolish virgins, who, in going forth to meet the bridegroom on his way home with the bride, neglected to carry oil in their vessels with their lamps, to make provision for feeding and renewing the flame ; fancying that there would be no need for it, that by the time they reached the spot at which they were to fall in and follow, the marriage procession would be seen approaching, or, at least, would be close at hand ; and who, thus unduly confident, were found at last unprepared,—unprepared to join the company, and share the feast ; not a sign of the bridegroom appearing, until midnight, when, roused from the drowsiness that had stolen upon them in the course of the weary delay, by the cry, “ Behold, he cometh ! ” they discover, to their confusion and distress, that the lights which they had no means of replenishing, were dying out ; and while they went to purchase the wherewith to revive them, the glittering cavalcade came sweeping by, passed on with unpausing tread to the banquet chamber, “ and the door was shut ”—shut to be opened no more.

In both these illustrations, you observe, the warning given is based upon the *uncertainty* of the period of the Son of Man's return ; the distinction between them being, that in the first the uncertainty is urged as a reason for *instant* preparation, lest we should be caught before beginning, since the event might happen presently ; and in the second, as a reason for using means to *sustain* intact the preparation achieved, lest it should gradually wear out, or become dissipated ; since the event might keep us waiting long. With reference to the risk and peril of putting off the necessary arrangements for a crisis or situation, concerning which it is impossible to guess *when* it may transpire—how suddenly or how soon,—with reference to this, the Jewish Talmud has its parable as follows : "There was a king who bade all his servants to a great repast, but he did not indicate the hour. Some went home and dressed themselves at once in their best garments, and stood thus attired at the gate of the palace ; others said, There is ample time ; the king will let us know beforehand when we are to come ; but he summoned them without further notice, in a moment, and they that stood in their best garments were well received, but the foolish ones, who loitered in their slovenliness, were sent away in shame and disgrace." One cannot but be struck with the resemblance here, to the manner and method of our Lord. Even thus, might He have represented the danger of delaying to prepare for the coming of the Son of Man. Even thus, in a similar form

and style, *does* He speak in the passage before us, only that *its* point is, the importance of taking care to *remain* prepared, that, however long may be His tarrying, however late His coming, we may not be the less ready to go in with Him to the marriage.

And now, starting from hence, without attempting any full exposition of the picture, let me just seize and apply three sad features of the foolish virgins' case which the text presents, viz. their neglect, their unreadiness, and their irretrievable loss.

1st. *Their neglect.*—Having equipped themselves duly, for taking part in the wedding march, by kindling their lamps, they omitted to ensure that the equipment should be maintained, carrying with them no reserve of oil for their lamps. There they were, *at the moment*, all right, in a condition of beautiful fitness; had the bridegroom burst upon them at once, over the hill, upon the slope of which they gathered expectantly, there would have been no lack in them—they would have swept on brilliantly; but the trial to which his late arrival subjected them, they had thoughtlessly failed to arm themselves for. They had not recognised the wisdom of making provision to *keep alive* the light they bore.

Ah, sirs, how much good fades and dies away, for want of nourishment; how many precious divine things there are, in the shape of generous impulse, noble enthusiasm, earnest conviction, tender and sorrowful repentance, that might have ultimated in splendid character, or

brought forth splendid works, and at one time promised to do so, but that have spent themselves and come to nothing, for want of being looked after, for want of care to detain, and root, and establish them! How much there is that wastes and withers, which should have lived richly, which had no business to perish, and needed not, if only it had been properly guarded and fostered. The deaths—the pitiful deaths—of little children, from privation and neglect, among whom, behind the pinched faces, and the sad wistful eyes, there may have lain hid, God knows what germs of power for the help and blessing of the world—what rudiments of sage and hero, large-hearted or princely man: *these* are but images in their sphere, of that which is going on continually in the sphere of moral soul and moral life, where so many *little ones* of faith and holy feeling, of love and high resolve, are always drooping and passing,—drooping and passing, because they are left untended and unfed. Let us remember; nothing of worth or sweetness is to be kept safe and sound, vital and strong, without some care and endeavour to keep it. If you would preserve your goodness, you must feed it like a shepherd, gather it with your arms, and carry it in your bosom. If you would *abide* upon the heights to which you have mounted, and hold your position among the hills of God, you must set a watch, and stand girded to fight for it.

The difficulty, after all, with respect to fine impulses—movements of inward elevation heaven-

ward, and inward consecration Christward,—the difficulty, is not to *have* them, but to constrain them to *tarry* with us; to tarry with us, at least, in the shape of resulting refinement and purity, of resulting dignity or faithfulness. We are being again and again overtaken by them; they visit us in the way, often unexpectedly, to our surprise. Who is there who is not at times swept up above himself, and in aspiration, and conviction, and resolve, made ready for the Lord? But the difficulty is to go on from thence; to be from thenceforth so much healthier, and stronger, and further on the road that climbs. Such will never be the case with us, unless we strive. We must set ourselves to foster and nourish our good things, to try to *fix* them in character and life.

But glance, secondly, at the *unreadiness* of the foolish virgins. Through not having made provision for keeping their lamps alight, they were unprepared to attend the bridegroom; they missed the opportunity of joining the marriage procession, and accompanying it to the feast. "Watch," says Christ, "for ye know not the hour." No, we never know the hours of opportunity that are coming; what the next situation will be we cannot tell, or when and how the heaven of acquiring or ministering blessing, will next be let down and opened upon us. The grand thing is to stand equipped—equipped for entering into, and taking possession of whatever shall come. Opportunity may break in the form of some fierce temptation to be fought with and resisted, or of some miser-

able trouble to be meekly and patiently borne, or perchance of some charming success to be enjoyed and used ; and how often are men found unready to inherit such as these ? There are opportunities that we hunger for and dream of ; at length they present themselves, and lo ! we fail to rise to them. They pass by and leave us unenriched. We say, " Oh, for a season of leisure ; a season without the hurry and pressure of outward engagements, in which to meditate and think, to sit with quiet mind, and hold communion with ourselves, and revolve many things at large ; " but going on the while, in mental idleness and dissipation, when some day the wished-for season comes, we are unable to take advantage of it ; meditation and thinking are as far from us as ever. Or we say : " Oh, for a little more space, a little more time, that we might accomplish this and that which now we are precluded from attempting. *Then* such and such things should be read, and such and such dropped threads be taken up to the completion of long unfinished work." But, alas ! not preparing ourselves by making the most of the *present* narrow space, or utilising earnestly the *present* limited time, when the desired enlargement is given, it is given in vain ; we utterly fail to occupy it, as we thought and determined we would.

The Bridegroom is *always* on the road, and we are *always* going forth to meet Him. Each day comes bearing with it on its wings some gracious opportunity ; some fresh opening into good, and

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blessing ; some new possibility, either of being useful or securing progress. But we must lay in oil for our lamps, with payment of constant effort to keep ourselves in the true spirit and tone, if we would profit by it; otherwise we shall assuredly pay for our neglect in missing it. Sometimes we are shut out *unconsciously*. We dream not of what we are losing from day to day, through our lack of preparation ; of the advents that occur that might have carried us on to joy and feast, and do not ; of the tides that might have loosened us from our moorings, and borne us out to deeper waters, but which, as it is, we are not ready to seize and rise upon.

Sometimes, again, we are *conscious* of being shut out ; and then there are sorrowful cries, "with weeping and gnashing of teeth." We see the golden gates stand open, and would fain enter in, and seek to do so, but cannot. The boy who has neglected his studies at school, mourns to find himself unqualified for the position that offers such a prospect of gain. What would he give now to have been found prepared ! The man who has suffered his heart to grow worldly, and coarse, and hard, instead of keeping it with all diligence, seeks to be satisfied with simple pleasures ; to rest and refresh himself, in the quiet home circle, with the children's prattle and the daughter's song ; to be quickened and elevated by the beautiful and the lofty in nature, with its sunsets and its silent hills ; or to receive impressions from religious truth ; but seeks in vain,

"Oh, could I weep as I have wept,  
Or be what I have been,  
Or weep as I could once have wept  
O'er many a vanished scene!  
As springs in desert found seem sweet,  
All brackish though they be,  
So 'midst the withered waste of life  
Those tears would flow to me."

Such has been the bitter lament of many, who through omitting to guard and nourish the good things in them, have lived to discover that their lamps are going out, and that, be the bridegroom ever so inviting, they cannot enter with him to the feast.

Brethren, life is a perpetual advent. The marriage supper is always laid, in some guise or other. There is no day that has not its approaching glory, its light that beckons, its table that groans. See to it, that you miss none of the things that are provided, but by preserving and fostering the divine in you, "be ye also ready."

Once more, consider the foolish virgins' *irretrievable loss*. In consequence of their unreadiness for that wedding festival, in which otherwise they might have participated, they were shut out for ever. There was the music, and the joy, but it was not for them, and never would be for them. While they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and the maidens with replenished and burning lamps, passed in with him, and the door was closed. On their returning, too late; in answer to to their knock, they were inexorably denied admittance. And have we not all lost some

things—some sweet and good things—that but for our folly, we should have gained ?

Alas, how stern and unrelenting is the vengeance of the Lord! I cannot *now* make of my life what I might have made. The time is past. I cannot become—strive as I may—what I might have become, had my early education and habits been different, had I improved those years which I wasted. I cannot hope to be on earth, the joyful, free, facile child of God that I might have been, had I kept myself from that long grovelling in dissoluteness and sensuality to which my youth was given. It is not possible that the wrongness of yesterday can be without its abating, detracting effect upon the rightness of to-day. No, the Bridegroom comes and wakens us—wakens us to higher thoughts and nobler aims, and we think, “would that we could be and do, thus and thus;” but it cannot be. The former things must need limit us. Let the young remember this. They say sometimes, “Oh, never mind, I shall not go on indulging as I do; I shall act differently in time;” and so probably they will, for youthful follies are not only often repented of and thrust aside, but they often gradually cease and expire of themselves. Yet they leave their mark behind, the print of their influence may be traced. When you begin to ascend, the loftiest altitude you reach, will be somewhat less lofty than it would have been had you never stooped for a while so low. My plant is put in late, and under unfavourable circumstances; the spring sunshine embraces it, and it

unfolds and expands, it buds and blooms, and I take pleasure in the fragrance thereof, yet, ah me, the growth and flowering, at the best, are not what they would have been, had its planting been other, and earlier than it was.

But what becomes of the foolish virgins? It is not hinted, by any means, that their lamps never flamed again—that in going to buy, they found the shops all closed, and were unable to supply themselves with fresh oil; there is nothing in the story to lead us to conclude that such was the case. On the contrary, it would seem to be implied, in the fact of their subsequent re-appearance upon the scene, and their confident application for admittance to the banquet-chamber, that they were no longer the bearers of extinguished lamps, but had succeeded in getting them revived, and re-lighted; only they were *too late for the feast*. It mattered not that they had at length repaired their former neglect. They could not now obtain an entrance there. And of what use then, you ask, their hurried journey to the village with tears of repentance, and their eager expenditure for the sake of making themselves fit, with wick aflame? To what purpose all this effort and cost, since the door of the festive chamber was hopelessly shut against them? Well, at least, they were once more as maidens should be, who had been appointed to meet the bridegroom.

They wore their proper aspect again, and the lights they had secured, would serve to light them along the road home. They were no longer in

darkness. That was something—though they *had* missed the wedding supper. And there is always something to be done, something to be gained, that is worth gaining, even when the *best* is irrecoverably lost. It is never too late to repent, to improve, to make a fresh beginning, and enter upon a new life, few as may be the years that are left for growth and progress, little as may be the strength which is left with which to climb. It is never too late to obtain the mercy of the eternally merciful Lord, and to receive redemption and healing from Him, and become His faithful disciples, His lowly and obedient children.

Whatever spiritual eminence and distinction, your long past of base habit, or depraved pursuit may have rendered impossible to you, the shops are never shut, and if you cannot be what you might have been, how much better you may be, than you are. If you cannot quaff the wine of the feast, at least you can drink of the river of the water of life, and have it spring up within you, purifying for a future, greater than you know. Go and buy then, with instant repentance, and surrender to Christ, and let Him be made to you salvation and righteousness; let Him bless what is left of you; the scope and material that remain after much ruin from sin—the exhausted force, the weakened soul, the wrong and wayward will. Let Him bless what is left of you, and transform it into something of beauty and order, and something of hope. Sudden transgressor, if any such there be among you, *go and buy*; middle-aged

backslider, with wasted decades behind you, *go and buy*; old man, dark, and lost at the grave's mouth, with but a step betwixt you and death; *go and buy*; and though it may be too late to live brightly on earth, at least *die brightly* into the day, —the day of boundless hope that lies beyond.







## ON ACCEPTING JOYS.

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DEUTERONOMY xxvi. 11.

"And thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the Lord thy God hath given unto thee."

**T**HIS was not an intimation of what would happen, but a *command*. As in the preceding verse Moses enjoins upon the people, that when the land of promise became possessed by them, they should take of the first of all the fruits of the harvest, and present it to the Lord in solemn offering,—with worship and thanksgiving,—so here he enjoins upon them, that they should not fail to surrender their hearts to be made glad and jubilant with the gifts of heaven,—that every one of the beauties and pleasures in which their future would abound, they should respond to with open arms of delight, and give themselves up cordially and unreservedly to rejoice in. Says the inspired old man : "Be sure to recognise and acknowledge God as the source and proprietor of all wealth, by laying upon His altar, with appropriate confession, a tithe of your first ingathering ;" and then he says, "Be sure also, to *fill* yourselves with the good of each good

thing that He sends you ; let its entire sweetness distil upon you, embrace and luxuriate in it thoroughly." He would have them, in a word, to accept the full gladness of whatever might come in their way that was gladdening.

Now, this is my subject to-day : the duty and importance, of improving every opportunity of innocent enjoyment that may be granted us ; the duty and importance, of giving *unstinted* welcome to every visit of enjoyment with which we may be favoured. There is often, I am persuaded, much wrongful negligence, much culpable unfaithfulness, here. We are frequently allowing streams of refreshment or exhilaration to run past us without dipping into, or tasting them ; we blunderingly overlook many a cup of pleasing and soothing that is offered to us, as we go trudging by ; or else stupidly and wilfully *foul*, and if not foul, wilfully and stupidly *dilute*, the draught we stoop to drink, and cheat ourselves of its pure flavour ; we are not sufficiently *impressible* to casual delights that stray across our path, or sufficiently *bold* and *ample* in entertaining them ; we wastefully suffer a good deal of lurking consolation to escape us, or to be marred and diminished in the act of receiving it ; we are slow to discover and seize our golden chances, and hardly know how to make the most of them. At times, we are *afraid* it would seem ; taking our joy in a half-timid, half-hesitating way, pausing now and then, to squeeze a drop or two of severe or melancholy reflection into the goblet, as if there might be *sin* in having it too rich, and

sweet, as if some grim, dyspeptic Power sitting up aloft, to whom our happiness was nausea, and who would be likely to interfere, and upset it when it mounted too high, might be propitiated with these voluntary abatings and embitterings of it, and would permit it, thus kept under and qualified, to continue undisturbed.

I have been surprised to observe how many Christian people there are, who appear unable to take a great happiness without attempting to reduce and dash it somewhat; who appear to think it incumbent upon them to throw in, ever and anon, a few depressing suggestions, a few sad and doleful hints, lest it should be too perfect, and on *that* account be snatched from them. Once and again they draw breath in the midst to say: "Oh, but how perishable and uncertain are all sublunary things; what calamity and desolation may be awaiting us to-morrow; and what misery there is now in other lives, and other hearts, around us." They *set* themselves to try and disease their happiness a bit, instead of freely yielding themselves to it while it lasts, and inheriting it to the utmost; instead of rejoicing in every good thing which the Lord their God has given them, they are *afraid* to do so.

Then, again, at times, when in dark hours a gleam of sunshine visits us, we are apt to shrink back into our trouble, and refuse to accept and enjoy the transient brightness; we decline to come out at its call, and lose for a moment our sad mind

and circumstances in the charm of it; there is a disposition to hug these, and nurse, and foster them, rather than make an effort to turn toward, and court, and fix our gaze on this; we will not *rouse* ourselves to lay hold upon, and derive from it the little passing relief or cheer that we might—the little passing relief, or cheer, which it contains for us, and is divinely charged with. The angel descending to solace us in our Gethsemane, with a brief, pleasant thrill,—with a brief glimpse and gust of pleasure, flashes by under the sombre wailing olives in vain,—is allowed to vanish, unharboured and unutilised. Oh, there are numberless offers of helpful comfort and diversion, of helpful respite and ravishment, that approach us in our seasons of sorrow or disquiet, and that we give no heed to, that we foolishly and faultily neglect to accept, saying, “What have we to do with such things just now? How can we suffer ourselves just now, to be melted with softness and smiles?”

The other evening, oppressed unusually with anxieties and cares that made me insensible to the tender spring loveliness, and the floating fragrance of the trees, I was slouching along over this hill toward the west; and, happening suddenly to lift my eyes, caught sight of a fragment of glowing landscape and a splash of sunset sky that arrested me, but instantly withdrawing into the enclosure of my trouble, went hurrying on with the feeling—a half sullen feeling, I fear—that it was no time for me, and that I had neither the heart nor the power, to give myself to *that* kind of thing *then*, to

surrender to the joy of bathing in a glance from Nature's face. The next moment, however, came the word that has become my text of discourse to-day : "Thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the Lord thy God sendeth thee;" and resolutely stopping, and looking, I came forth from my inward gloom to the waiting scene,—*waiting for me*,—and let it charm me and take possession of me, and fill me with its thoughts, to the exclusion of my own; and when I retired again presently under the cloud, it was not heavier, neither was I weaker to bear it, for the few minutes of delight that had been snatched from that which offered itself in the way.

Never turn, in your bitterness of spirit, from any ministry of temporary enjoyment that may intervene; never be so wedded to your woes, so shut up and sunk down in them, that you cannot issue forth to accept such ministry.

I do not say that we should be ready to clutch at every promise of distraction and solace that beckons us; that with restless, impatient longing to escape from our burdens, we should throw ourselves recklessly upon every invitation to be diverted or comforted. God forbid! Men whose road through life is rough and toilsome are often tempted to do this; to fly for relief again and again into whatever refuge invites them;—anything, anything, for a little ease and forgetfulness: and from hence has begun the deterioration, and the ultimate ruin, of thousands. We need, when our path is hard, to guard against such inclinations,

and to pass sternly many an arbour of repose that opens alluringly beside us. Let no weariness induce you to seek a moment's rest, aside from, or below, the level of righteousness and principle, or that would be likely to imperil in the least your adherence to these; do not *wander* to seize refreshment, but if any come to *meet* you as you are marching straight on, do not neglect to embrace it. Neither, again, would I say aught to encourage the constant, eager longing and looking out for enjoyment which you find exemplified in some who are always laying plans, and devising schemes, to *catch* pleasure; whose *main object* it is, to discover and choose smoother paths for their feet, and to whom nothing is so intolerable as an interruption of personal comfort, or an absence of outward colour and sunshine.

Miserable souls are these, and no less debased than miserable; but what I enjoin is simply this: leave your door and window open, while you are toiling and enduring, for any sweetness of beauty or perfume that would enter, and do not shrink or hesitate to entertain it and bask in it to the utmost; be charmed and gladdened whenever you *can* be honestly and healthily, without restraint; rejoice in every good thing which the Lord thy God giveth thee. For remember, we want to be made joyful, for our *education*, quite as much as we need to be tried and troubled. To laugh—to luxuriate—to ripple and glow with delight at times, is just as essential for us, as it is at times to weep and suffer. We cannot do without seasons of cheer and ex-

hilaration. In heaven we may not need them so much as now ; the larger we grow, and the higher we ascend, the less dependent we may be upon them. I expect one day to be above them ; but at present, they are requisite as instruments of training, like the children's toys and picture-books ; and if they who strive to run from their griefs, reject a valuable discipline and means of grace, *so* also, do they who refuse to accept, or fail to entertain adequately, the joys that are sent them. If we would receive our education here, we must not neglect to stand and bask freely in such sunshine as visits us.

Now, at times, some of us perhaps have had *this* thought, *this* feeling : there is always so much misery and wretchedness around us, life is so full of dark and painful mystery, that it seems hardly right to enjoy ourselves ever in the midst of these,—hardly right to ignore and forget them for a moment, in rejoicing. Ought we to be *able* to do it ? Nay, is it not difficult to do it ? Must we not more or less mar our golden hours with the shadow of them, and sigh while we sing ? But let us reflect that since, according to the revelation of Jesus Christ, God is the Father, and we are His children, we are *justified* in losing sight of them now and again, for a time, when He gives us a joy to taste, and should be *capable* of losing sight of them. Because we are the children, and He is the Father, we may, and should, leave the burden of them with Him, when He flashes upon us a beauty to admire or a pleasantness to rest and revel in.

Being only a child; however I must feel about His world, and share to some extent in His travail concerning it, I need not be afraid at intervals to cast the entire load upon Him, and let Him carry it alone. I need not be perpetually bearing it with Him; neither, indeed, does He require or wish me. I do not want my children to take upon them the weight of my trouble and care. I like them to be able to suffer with me in a measure; to know, and understand, and feel *a little* of what presses upon me; to be not altogether untouched and unchastened by the shadow of their father's pain or solicitude; and as true children they are not insensible to it. They do enter somewhat into my pain and solicitude, and increasingly, the older they grow; but still, while they are *growing*, they must not be too grave and anxious; I want them to go and be merry, to go and enjoy themselves, and leave *me* to bear.

And so, in the midst of our groanings under the sad mysteries of life, and our concern for the weepers by whom we are surrounded, God is often saying to us in the happy circumstances—in the opportunities of enjoyment with which He blesses us—"Come, come, be children, and run and play awhile; let Me bear this." My child must play to grow. And so must we. Pleasure is a part of our education. We ought not to be too precocious; children should *be* children, and enjoy themselves, content to let the main burden rest with the Father—not little old men and women, as some children of God are, who refuse to escape

ever into the sunshine, because there is so much to see to and to set in order; so much to fret over and be anxious about in the house;—who are for ever harassing themselves with the state of things, instead of casting it upon the Lord; and who wear such careworn, solemn faces, that one would imagine there was no Father of the universe at all. No; being children, we are to rejoice in every good thing that Heaven sends us, unheedful for the time, of the mysteries and the miseries in the midst of which we live. We need not hesitate to give ourselves up to enjoyment on account of the confusion and disorder, the evils and the sufferings, that we leave behind us, seeing that the Almighty Parent is left with them. He does not require us to be always feeling them, and *we* require to be sometimes forgetful of them.

True, there are here and there exceptionally great souls who can do without it; whose *mission* it is, to be swallowed up in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings; upon whom *necessity* is laid to be so charged with the woe of some region of wrong or wretchedness, as to be incapable of responding to any call to indulgence in repose or pleasure. They *must* go on toiling and bearing, with scarcely any intermission, for luxuriating; they have neither the time nor the disposition for it. The Lord Jesus was supreme among these; and, as He said, "they that are able to receive it, let them receive it;" but they are only *the few*, who can. Most of us are not capacious or divine

enough, and had better not try; it would be too much for us; we should be only wrung and spoiled by it, as some would-be philanthropists have been, whom devotion to too-exclusive occupation with the claims of misery around them, has served to warp and narrow on this side or the other.

And, after all, have not the best and noblest of those who have sternly consecrated themselves to lives of wholly self-denying labour, and wholly self-sacrificing endurance, in the cause of God and His world, been men who knew how to unbend and relax right heartily; how to steal moments of playfulness or joyfulness in passing, and to quaff draughts of delights in hasty snatches? Oh, yes; children must and may rejoice, at seasons, in every good thing, however consecrated and earnest they are. And they need to do so; to forget all the surrounding mystery and misery, at intervals, in the escapes that offer by the way, into green pastures or beside still waters, that they may be the better able to bear and to minister. The Lord preserve us from physicians, and reformers, who are too sympathetically intent upon our maladies and disorders, to be capable of enjoying the enjoyable. They are anything but great at healing. Souls must need turn aside at times, to bask in what sunshine they can find, and be mellowed, and warmed, and rosied with it, *in order* to be of service in the darkness, and to help to soften and relieve it. Let none of us fear, then, to lay hold on every opportunity of rejoicing, with both hands, earnestly. We are expected and required to do it, and it will

be the worse for ourselves, and—through *our* defect—the worse for others, if we fail.

You will say, perhaps, that some people may complain, that for *them* there are no openings into gladness—no invitations to pleasure, of which they could avail themselves; but that is because they do not recognise them, and will not purify and qualify themselves to recognise them.

Who can be said to suffer privation and destitution here, with the green trees, and the ever-changing sky, awaiting him day by day; with now and then a new picture to look at, and now and then a new poem to read; with the faces and ways of little children to be watched; with the movement and colour of the streets, the charm and excitement of social intercourse, the bosom of friendship, and so forth? There are plenty of good things for us all, which the Lord our God gives us to rejoice in, however sombre and cloudy the prevailing hue of our lives may be. We want only natures more open, and susceptible to them—natures more sensitive to common and simple sources of delight; we walk to and fro, often, with grovelling eyes, and see them not. At this season of the year especially, it seems to me that God is saying to us, "Come, and be happy—come and enjoy." For myself, while in the winter I may sit much in the shadow of mystery and misery; spring and summer call me out from under it, to lose for a time the sense and sadness of it, in the new world of beauty that flushes round me; and acceptance of the divinely provided escape, helps

to strengthen and prepare me for the shadow again. We do not get delights enough, many of us, for our mental and moral health and wholesomeness—little transient delights by the way, to sweeten, and tone, and fillip us ; and one reason is, because many of us are not sufficiently impressionable to the sources that are always about us.

I like to see a man entranced over the colour of a flower, ravished with the spectacle of a crimson sunset, enjoying a lovely face, a musical verse, a flash of wit, a gem of art, or a novel specimen of humanity ; and I *urge* the cultivation of such delights, because they are required to contribute to our education as spiritual beings, equally with the cares and vexations, the trials and burdens of life ; because to rejoice in every *good* thing which the Lord our God sends us, is as much a duty, and a benefit, as to receive meekly, and endure patiently, the burden of *evil* things.



## DAVID'S SELF-RESTRAINT.

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I CHRONICLES xxii. 7, 8.

“And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the Lord my God : but the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars : thou shalt not build an house unto My name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in My sight.”

**T**HERE is something very touching and pathetic in this. The old King, whose heart had been so set on building a fit shrine for the Ark of God, and within whom, late circumstances connected with the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite had revived the desire so strongly, that he had been unable to resist commencing some preparations toward the erection of the shrine ;—the old King, in the midst of his ardent longing, and his impulsive attempt to start the work, compelled to feel again, what he had felt years before, when the idea first took possession of him,—that it was not for *him* to carry out; that necessity was laid upon him to refrain from going on with it; and reluctantly relinquishing the enterprise into the hand of his son, to be executed by him after the father

who had conceived and cherished it, and was now more than ever craving to accomplish it, had passed away.

Bitter, surely, was the disappointment and pain; and not seldom has it been experienced. Many a man has nursed fondly, the thought of some good or great thing that he meant to do—some good or great thing of which he knew himself to be capable, and to which he seemed to be called; but there was always an unavoidable and unsurmountable hindrance that prevented his entering upon it. At length, however, the time appeared to have come, and, full of enthusiasm, he has made a beginning; but soon—very soon—has been obliged to see and acknowledge that it was not to be *his* achievement; that, though consciously qualified and equipped, he must be content to drop it, to surrender meekly the dream of his life, and leave it to be realised by others, when he has sunk into the grave. Oh, the broken high aims, the interrupted noble purposes of men! What a long and mournful procession would it be, could they pass in array before us.

But it was not that sufficient *time* was denied to David, that death was too rapidly approaching, that circumstances were against him. His eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated; and opportunity and resources abounded. It was something stronger than these, which, in spite of their invitation, restrained and stayed him. His was the trial, the sore trial of feeling, that while in respect of ability, situation, means, appliances, all was

most favourable, uniting to coincide with his desire, to encourage and solicit him to indulge it; yet *he must not*—must not do that which he fain would, and might. And hard as it is, when things around you oppose a hopeless barrier to your prosecution of a worthy and honourable undertaking, upon which the mind has been fixed, and to which the affections are given; may it not be said to be still harder, when with things around you entirely propitious; thoughts within you, that cannot be seen, and that may not be appreciated and understood by others, inhibit your proceeding?

And what was it that hindered the Hebrew King? Nothing more than had hindered him all along; nothing but a sense—a fine and delicate sense—of *the becoming*. When some twenty years earlier, as he sat at rest in his cedar palace, with his throne thoroughly established and his enemies subdued, it had first occurred to him to provide a house “exceeding magnificent” for the Almighty, and he had resolved on doing so; a voice within him had immediately whispered, “No; however right and praiseworthy the idea, *you* are hardly the man to carry it out. Your hands are too stained with blood. Your life has been too full of fighting and slaying; it would not be suitable or seemly that *such* a work should be done by *you*; and now, when the vision of the angel by the threshing-floor of Ornan—appearing to him to indicate the spot, the true spot, for a temple to Jehovah—has roused in him anew, the aspiration to build, and with so much intensity as to impel him to dash at the

preliminary steps—*now* the same voice made itself heard still. He had endeavoured to be deaf to it, to withstand and suppress it, but he could not; it was a voice of God in his breast, speaking with power and authority not to be resisted. "There would be serious unfitness, O man of many and bloody wars, in *your* performance of the sacred task." And you will observe, that although David tells Solomon in the text, that such was the ground on which the Lord had forbidden him, yet when Nathan the prophet forbade him in the name of the Lord, no such reason was stated, or in the least implied—all that was said being, that the time had not arrived; that *he* was not to attempt it, but to leave it for his son, and successor. Very possibly, Nathan *saw* wherein the objection lay to the King's pursuance of his wish and design, only he did not like—did not care to represent it to him—satisfied, moreover, that the bare prohibition in the name of the Lord, would be enough for his hearer. Was it not, then, the devoutly susceptible hearer himself, who had guessed it, felt it, all unspoken though it was; that *that* was how he had understood the message of the seer—that *that* was what his heart had read in it—that when the Divine word came, simply interdicting, it awoke in him at once, a Divine perception of the reason, and reasonableness of it; and the God-taught, God-chastened spirit within him made him see at once, *why* the work of enshrining the Ark, the Ark of the holy and awful Presence, must not be his?

With some men the slightest hint is fruitful,

while others, the fullest utterance will fail to quicken, or enlighten. We *find* in most things what we *bring* to them; and every word of the Lord hides more than it reveals, until the brooding of the prepared soul draws forth its secret.

But consider, now, the *remarkable self-restraint* displayed by David. He who had lived much in camps and on the battle-field—who with sword and spear had won mighty victories, and proved irresistible to all who opposed themselves whose will was law through the length and breadth of the land—who was accustomed to be obeyed and yielded to—he could stay himself from prosecuting his darling scheme, and in the midst of ample means and opportunity for prosecuting it, with the thought of *incongruity*. Such a thought was capable of influencing him to resign one of the dearest purposes of his soul. You would hardly have expected it. How impetuous, and even headstrong, he was at times, how driven and carried away by passion; and yet, here he is, subdued and turned, in the mid heat of fervid desire and eager attempt, by a whispering sense of *becomingness*. One may notice frequently, the same contrasts in men. In some respects, and in some situations, what an utter lack of strength and self-control they show. And then, again, in other matters, and in other circumstances, what power to command and deny themselves.

But there are two or three things, it seems to me, which the self-restraint of the Jewish king in relation to the building of a house for the Lord,

may be said to indicate concerning himself. Does it not reveal, *first*, the reality—the intense reality—which God was to him, as well as the impressions which he had of the character of God? His worship of the national Jehovah could not have been a mere empty form, or political pretence. *He*, the magnificent Eastern monarch, whose determination to construct a magnificent temple, was arrested and changed by the consideration that there would be *unseemliness* in his doing it, in consequence of the fierce fighting life he had led,—*he* must have believed sincerely and profoundly in the Deity whom he professed; God must have been very real to him, otherwise he would never have been led to halt thus in his idea, and feel bound to abandon it. How pure and lofty, moreover, for his age, would be his conception of the Almighty Ruler, when it struck him as altogether inappropriate and inconsistent, that a shrine should be built for Him by one who had been engaged, however patriotically and for the interests of his country, in shedding much human blood. Does it not betray the beautiful Divine Ideal which he had learnt to see and cherish; that in the God whom he worshipped he beheld no reckless, capricious, or immoral omnipotence, but an image of transcendent goodness and benignity—One in whose sight the lives of men were precious, and to whose eye scenes of slaughter and carnage were revolting? What *kind* of God it is who is nearest to us, and most real to us, we shall surely disclose often, in what we say and do.

Then, again, does not the picture which we have of David in the text, indicate, with respect to him, that although a man of war from his youth, who had lived with the sword in his hand, and by the sword had accomplished great things; he yet had never been proud of fighting—had never deemed it the highest and noblest of occupations, or that which he would have chosen before all others, had it been left to him to choose? May we not infer that it was not wholly to his liking—that it was not his idea of what was grandest and best to be employed in? *He* who conceived of God as recoiling from battle and blood, and felt that his own connection with these tended to disqualify him for the honour of rearing a temple to God,—must we not think of *him*, in his perpetual warrings, as resigning himself to do, not what he loved, or what he would have most delighted in, but the work that was *laid* upon him—that circumstances required and demanded of him? The sweet singer of Israel, whose youth had been full of days of divine meditation among the silent hills of Bethlehem, and to whom had been given the touch and vision of the sacred poet; *he* did not want to become a fighting man, and would rather not have been. He had had dreams, perhaps, in his father's fields, of quite another sort of career for himself, and could see something far more attractive and desirable; it was not his ideal life; but it was what his lot had rendered inevitable for him, and incumbent on him; it was what he *had* to do, and he did it.

So, often, have men had to feel—This is the work plainly cut out for me, though it is not to my taste at all, and I must accept it, and stick to it. It is not what I would have selected ; there are other lines of activity that I should infinitely prefer to pursue, and that seem to me worthier and better ; but this, as selected for me, I must e'en embrace ; seeking to make the best of it, striving heartily to be faithful and true in it.

Then, once more, observe revealed here, the remarkable preservation of David's higher sensibilities. One might well have foreboded, or feared, that his life in camp and field, his prolonged occupation with the sword, his familiarity with scenes, and participation in acts, of bloodshed, his wars and victories, would leave him somewhat coarsened, with his *delicacy* of perception and feeling a good deal impaired, his susceptibility to the finest impressions and influences, a good deal blunted ;—as in so many instances, by contact with sordid circumstances and surroundings, by experience of poverty and the pressure of narrow means, by compelled employment in rough work, or association with vulgar and worldly people, men are found to have become spiritually lowered and deteriorated, to have lost much of their former *nice texture*, and capacity of fresh, healthy emotion, to be comparatively unresponsive to Divine touches that would once have thrilled them. But it was not thus, evidently, with David. Neither the tumult and strife of years of warfare, nor the elation of suc-

cesses gained by bow and spear, had prevailed to coarsen him, to render him gross and dull of soul. He emerges from it all, on the contrary, sensitive enough to answer readily to the whispered suggestions of *seemliness*; to be restrained and turned back upon the threshold of a coveted enterprise, by the sense of *the becoming*. "Stay," he says; "dearly as I have longed for it, dearly as I yearn after it, I must not venture further; it would hardly be in good taste, would be wanting rather in propriety. With these stained hands, the work of preparing a habitation for the sacred Ark is not quite the work for me; let me leave it for other hands."

There is nothing that some men would not undertake. They have no modest fear of stepping beyond their province, of intruding where angels had better be left to walk, or of desecrating with their touch—not they; what can there be that *they* are not fit to pronounce upon, to meddle with, or to attempt? Were the Almighty to offer them the throne of the universe they would not mind trying it. Why should they? David's shrinking from the enterprise, to which inclination urged him, and opportunity and resources invited, on account of the many wars in which he had been engaged,—such persons would be likely to speak of with contempt, as "mere sentiment;" saying, that in so far as he had fought patriotically and conscientiously, and had been honest and faithful in what he believed to be his vocation, there would have been no wrongness,

or profanity at all, in his erection of the temple with battle-blooded hands. And I do not know that David himself would have judged that there was ; nevertheless, he *could not do it* ; it seemed to him not the thing ; he felt something jarring and untuneful in it ; and the delicate sentiment was just "an inverted image of the man's nobleness." Had but his nature been less refined and pure and elevated than it was, it would not have troubled him. Not to recoil from some things, which yet are by no means immoral or sinful, argues a dead and worldly soul. "Mere sentiment" is not always to be hastily condemned or sneered at, however there may be those who are incapable of understanding it, or of doing aught but make fun of it.

But let me close now, by calling your attention for a moment, to one or two things in connection with the Hebrew king's self-enforced disappointment. And *first* : although precluded from doing what he had purposed and wished to do, he did not, as is the case with many, make that an excuse for doing nothing ; did not, therefore, sulkily fold his hands, and decline to see what there was that he *might* do. Cheerfully accepting the inevitable, he girded himself at once, to accomplish all that was possible : setting to work to excite and influence his son, that through him the Temple might be built in coming days ; gathering together stores, and instituting arrangements with a view to it ; stirring up the country, and the leading men, to desire and prepare for it. And how much did

he really contribute thus to the sacred fane—how much that was done afterwards, when he lay silent in his grave, was owing to him, and his zealous efforts, and but for them might never have been done! When it was denied him to carry out his cherished idea and dream, he yet straightway found a work to do, and did it with his strength; and it was a work that lived, and was represented after all, in the magnificent shrine which he never saw.

Then see how his true thought and noble aim survived him; and survived him to be ultimately realised. The structure which he had conceived; and hoped, and sought in vain to erect to the glory of the Lord, *was* erected at last, although not by him, nor in his lifetime. It grew and rose at last, in all its wonderful splendour, though *he* was not there to behold it. And no true thought, no noble aim, ever does die; *he*, in whose brain and breast it was nursed and begotten, may, but *it* lives on, and is sure, some day, to be found embodied and fulfilled. Let him not go down weeping to the grave, because he has not been permitted to accomplish; there is always a Solomon appointed to succeed him, to enter into his labours, and complete them; and somewhere in the course of the ages, accomplishment is certain to come.

Consider, too, how sweetly *useful* the King would be, in *not* doing it. He failed, and was hindered in his attempt; he had to withdraw from, and relinquish it. Yet was there not *that* in his

withdrawing and relinquishing, that would minister naturally to the increase of religious feeling and religious awe in the land? Would not the Lord's House, when finished at length, be all the more sacred to the people, and their reverence for it, and for the God to whom it was consecrated, be quickened and deepened, as they remembered, how their late great king had not dared to go on with it, had not dared to lay a stone of it,—although he desired so earnestly,—*because* of the years of strife and war that stained his fingers; and how it had to wait long for hands sufficiently clean? So is it possible to serve the Divine cause by resigning and refraining, and even by failing and breaking down, no less than by achieving and accomplishing. If only we be sincere and faithful, if only the true spirit be in us, our very errors and mistakes shall not be unfruitful in blessing. There *is* such a thing, as being more useful in our dying, than others in their living; in perishing, than in prevailing.



## THE END OF THE COMMANDMENT.

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I TIMOTHY i. 5.

“Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.”

HERE are three senses in which this phrase, “The end of the commandment,” might be understood by us; and it is difficult to decide, at first sight, in which of the three the Apostle employed it, since all of them would be equally appropriate, and true to what follows. Thus, one could have supposed him to have meant the complete *carrying out* of the commandment; in accordance with the inculcation of Christ, and the New Testament Scriptures generally, that “love is the fulfilling of the law;” a life governed habitually by love to God and man, excluding all transgression, and comprehending all obedience. Or, again, the reference might well be to the main *purpose* and *object* of the commandment; which is, undoubtedly, our education—our enlargement and refinement toward the likeness of Him who *is* love. Such, surely, has been His grand aim all along, in whatever laws He has given, in whatever revelations He

has made, and especially in the Gospel—"the ministry of reconciliation," viz. to kindle and cultivate on earth the spirit of love. Or, once more, it may have been the *tendency* and natural *effect* of the commandment which St. Paul was contemplating; that it was calculated, and would operate to *produce* love; that love was the end to be achieved by its promulgation and reception,—in proportion as it won its way among men. And this, the context leads me to think, is the meaning, rather than either of the others, which his words were intended to bear. He has been deprecating, you will notice, the teaching on the part of some in the Ephesian Church, of certain strange doctrines; and has been reminding Timothy of his duty to endeavour to restrain those who taught them; adducing, as sufficient witness against them, that they "ministered questions," or, more correctly, furnished grounds for disputings—that *that* was their *sole* fruit; whereas, he then adds, "the end of the commandment"—or the message, the charge committed to us to deliver; the same word occurring in the 18th verse, where such is its significance—"the end of the commandment," the result and issue of the *true* doctrine, is charity: so may you always know and distinguish it; that it tends to promote the quickening and the growth of love—an apostolic test, you observe, for application in the sphere of religion and theology.

Whatever view or practice is seen to make *against* love, to lead legitimately to aught, in feeling or habit, that is contradictory of it

and contrary to it, should be at once suspected—nay, may at once be assumed to be untrue; it stands thereby self-condemned, without need of further examination. Whatever, on the other hand, is manifestly *conducive* to love—manifestly works and influences, in the direction of nourishing it and spreading it—displays therein the *imprimatur* of divinity. Toward such views or practices, we are justified in holding ourselves predisposed. Nothing can be of God, that acts prejudicially to the reign and progress of love; and nothing can be otherwise than godly, the bearings of which are favourable and contributive to it, for “God *is* love.” We may postulate, indeed, that the measure of worth and importance to be ascribed to any truth, should be according to the measure in which it tells for love—in which it is found to be powerful on the side of love; that those truths should occupy the highest place and the front rank in our creed, which are most largely love-inspiring, to which the upbuilding of love is most largely indebted. “The end of the commandment is charity.”

But conscious, one would infer, that this might be misunderstood, or inadequately appreciated, and improperly applied, St. Paul hastens in the next breath to qualify and explain. “Charity,” he says, “I mean, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned. *That* is the kind of love which the revelation of the Gospel may be expected to develop, and in which the right teaching will be

likely to have its fruit. *That* is the kind of love I am contemplating : a very different thing from much that is often designated love. Out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned."

Thus, you see, it is not love *directly*, all at once ; but no small amount of soil-forming and foundation-laying, first. The true love of which the Apostle was thinking, involves no little preparatory culture and accomplishing ; it is emphatically the commandment's *end*—the end of seed sown and work done. And, in society, the preliminary purifying and rightening may carry with it a great deal, that shall look like anything rather than love ; a great deal of sharp conflict and strife. It will not follow necessarily, that the doctrine or mission is false, though its *immediate* effect should be, to disunite and scatter, to provoke animosities and rages. *These* may be temporarily inevitable, in connection with "making straight in the desert a highway" for the advent of love. It may be *thus alone*, through such fierce and sad commotion, that its advent can be ensured ; as when He who came to be our peace, *began* by sending "not peace on the earth, but a sword." Those whose ministry in the world is really and richly love-tending, may often *seem*, both to be wanting in the spirit of it, and to be busy in preventing it ; by reason of the disturbances they must need create, and the passions they must need disengage, in the course of the cleansing or reforming process essential to its ultimate evolution.

The pureness, the morality, and the convictions required to generate it—without which it is impossible, cannot be inwrought, often, without considerable blood-shedding and blows. The apostle of love will have to be generally, for a time, the “troubler of Israel;” setting by the ears for the sake of reconciling—dividing in order to unite.

Then, again, love—true love, is not by any means, you see, the very simple and easy thing which it is frequently assumed to be. You cannot resolve to begin at once to be loving—you must *become* much, that you are not perhaps, to be so. It is not something that you can immediately take up and put on like a garment—it is a product—a growth—a tree to be got only from certain previously prepared soil—a birth under certain conditions. Men experience sometimes, I fancy, a sense of relief when told that love is everything, that to love is to fulfil the whole law. “Oh yes,” they say, lightly and cheerfully to their souls; “this is all that we have to do, you know, just to love; and this is not much.” But how about the “pure heart, the good conscience, and the faith unfeigned,” *out of which*, according to the Apostle, it must proceed? True, it is *not* much, to be for the most part gracious, and kind, and tender; to give away things, and indulge people, and think only of making them instantly comfortable; it is *not* much, especially for some persons—no straight gate, but a very broad and smooth way; it is their instinct

—their nature—they cannot help it. One might say of them, often, that they have not purity, conscience, or faith enough, to be and do otherwise; for there is a love, very pretty and pleasant, the effluence and exercise of which is owing to *the absence* of these. But, my dear sirs, this is not “the end of the commandment,” or “the fulfilment of the law.” The love which St. Paul intends and desires, is love rooted in purity, conscience, and faith; one of the highest and ripest attainments of the Christian life.

Let us look into it a little. Love, in the first place, “out of a pure heart;” in other words, a heart untainted; purged of low, narrow, sordid leanings—habitually ingenuous—generous and unselfish. In order to love divinely, we must have grown to *be* something Divine, in our general tone and habit—in our inward bent and make. We must have learned, for example, to rise above prejudice—prejudices of custom and education; to be full of a spirit of candour and impartiality; to be able to think and feel charitably; to conquer, or at least subdue within us, tendencies to indolence, cowardice, bigotry, pride, and the disposition to be suspicious and exacting in our affection. We must have learnt, too, to practise self-denial, and the withstanding of temptations to self-indulgence in trifles; to be capable of forgetting, foregoing, and losing ourselves—of not noticing, often, our own figure, not caring, often, for our own comfort; to be capable of having our finest joy in the joys of others, and our sufficient recompense in the

sense of serving the cause and progress of the human whole, the macrocosm of humanity to which we belong. We must have become inwardly refined and purified—inwardly sublimed; for while a beautiful heart is the crown and slow result of a loving life, there can be no real life of love without something of a beautiful heart behind it, to begin with.

There is a good deal of so-called love emotion, and love activity, behind which lies no beautiful heart. Men are swept now and then by affectionate impulses, and are led, under sudden melting or exciting circumstances, to do kind and gracious things, who are *not*, in their *nature*, particularly kind or gracious. And how many so-called outpourings of love, are secretly stained and tainted with selfishness; what littleness and meanness sleeps at the back of them—what poison of self-regard mixes with and depraves them. "The end of the commandment," says St. Paul, "is charity,"—but charity flowing from a spacious, noble, consecrated soul—from a fountain of sweet Divine life within. And *this*, the commandment, the Gospel, the revelation of God in Christ, is *fitted* to produce surely, by the great and glorious object which it presents for contemplation; by the heaven of august and grand realities which it opens upon us; by the message which it brings to us concerning the Father and the future—concerning God's purpose, and man's destiny and relations.

But it is love, also, "out of a good conscience;"

that is to say, with a *moral* element inspiring it—morally animated and controlled;—not mere instinctive kindness and tenderness, and desire to minister something in the way of comfort or succour, which is all very well, and very charming, but is not what the Apostle means and seeks—is not “the end of the commandment;” for this mere instinctive emotion may be, and often is, *immoral*, and hence, anything but true love. Thus, a parent cannot endure to see the child unhappy,—cannot bear to witness its tears of discontent, or disappointment; craves fondly to soothe and satisfy; and so gives it straightway what it asks—what will bring back at once, joy to the little heart, and brightness to the dimmed eyes; unmindful of whether it is wise and best for the child, unmindful of the parental duty and obligation, with respect to its due training and discipline. Now here is love *not* “out of a good conscience,”—love which is immoral, and hence, *really unloving*.

Or a friend sits sad, desponding, hopeless, bewailing his unfortunate circumstances, his gloomy and miserable prospects; and under an impulse of sympathy with him in his wretchedness, you put your arms around him, and seek to console him, with gentle expressions of concern; or you set about to provide him with temporary relief—to mitigate temporarily the painfulness of his condition; not considering, that his true welfare demands from you, perhaps, quite a different course; that it would be far more to his

real interest, however painful for the time, both to himself and you, if instead of *tenderness*, you showed *sternness*, and sought to rouse him with severe speech; if, instead of immediately relieving, you left him to suffer, while affording him opportunity, and taking the trouble to educate him, to become self-helpful. You follow the impulse of kindness, without regarding the man's claim upon you, to endeavour to act as would be most for his benefit. Here, again, is love unquickened and unguided by conscience; and it is *not* true love.

So there are people, amiable, affectionate souls, whose nature it is to want some one whom they can fondle, and yield to, and pour themselves out upon, and who *are* always thus devoted in some direction or other; bearing sweetly all the overbearings of the object of their regard, considering him, giving way to him in everything, studying nothing but his comfort and gratification; heedless altogether of the harm they are working—of the selfish, grasping, exacting creature they are helping to make him, or of their injustice perhaps, to others, and of the wrongful effect for *them* through such conduct. Their love is *immoral*; no thought, or sense of what is *right*, enters into or governs it.

Now the love which St. Paul indicated as “the end of the commandment,” is not this soft, weak, reckless kind of thing; it is love “out of a good conscience,”—a conscience alive to what is good, which ruling and influencing

the affectionate or sympathetic instinct, brings forth a love most loving, a love that can be stern and severe—that knows how to withstand, and refuse, and put to pain, with a view to the best interests, the real well-being of its object, for the sake of ultimate greater benefit to him; which is after the likeness of the holy love of God. Love without sensibility to the right, to men's claim upon us to do, not what is most pleasing or gratifying to them, but most useful and profitable for them, however temporarily disagreeable or wounding it may be; *this* is not true love, but love that is animated and guided by an earnest desire to be wisely beneficial, and not merely for the moment, kind; whose moral inspiration prevents it from rushing to relieve on the first tender impulse, when it would be better to *withhold* relief, and enables it to bear to see people suffer for their good, rather than save them from the pain, to their deeper injury; and such is the love which the commandment is calculated to promote by its morally quickening, morally educating revelations, and its unveiling of the holy love of God.

And now, lastly, it is "charity," says the Apostle, "out of faith unfeigned." That is, as I understand it, *faith in man*: a love that is inspired and sustained by convictions with regard to his dignity and greatness; which is not *mere* pity and compassion for the necessitous or the miserable, for men as poor unhappy wretches, to whom you are moved to give what comfort and help you can;

but which glows with a sense of their *worth* and *sacredness*, with a feeling of reverence for them ; hastening to serve and succour them—not as you would a dog, or a horse in pain, simply because they have need, but because of *what they are*, because of the rank and relations of those who suffer.

There is the love of *unbelief*, of which the present day affords us some examples—a love which recognising in man nothing but an outcome and development of matter ; nothing but a perishing, transient child of the dust, with no immortal future before him, and no invisible Father belonging to him ; says, “ Let us at least try to minister to him while he remains. It is a sad world, a world full of disorder and disease, that has grown up somehow out of the dark void, and is moving on to destruction and nothingness ; let us at least try to brighten and improve it while it lasts. We are fatherless nobodies, and all will soon be over ; let us at least comfort and help one another as best we may.” This is the love—the cheerless, melancholy love, of unbelief. And it is kind and generous enough ; its drear eyes weep with them that weep ; its pale hands are stretched forth to heal : but very different is the love which St. Paul contemplated, and to which the commandment leads. The commandment—with its blessed words, “ How much is a man better than a sheep ; ” “ Ye are of more value than many sparrows ; ” “ The hairs of your head are all numbered ; ” “ The Lord spared not His own Son, but delivered Him

up for us all ;” “ Ye are also His offspring ;” “ As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive ;” “ Who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep we should live together with Him ;”—the commandment,—with its declaration of the Divine Fatherhood, and the human Brotherhood, of redemption and immortality, and the call to the eternal glory,—*it* teaches us the sublime worth and dignity, the awful greatness and sacredness, of man ; shows us upon him, under all his dirt and disfigurement, the image and superscription of heaven ; presents him to us at his lowest estate, in his deepest debasement, as a child of the Highest, whom the Highest has come seeking, through sacrifice. And the love thus begotten is love “ out of faith unfeigned ”—love that feels with tender awe his unspeakable preciousness and value,—that embraces consciously, in its every embrace of the miserable, *a stricken son of God*.

And let me ask, is not such love, if you can attain to it, an infinitely superior thing to the warmest, busiest love of unbelief ? Is it not less likely to faint and grow weary ? Will it not be more patient and long-suffering, more solicitous and fervent ? Will there not be more spirit, more heart, in it ; more vigour and buoyancy in its step, more strength in its arm, more sweet cheer in its eye ? Must not men be more richly blest with it ; must not its touch be at once more grateful and more healing ? I would sooner, if I were “ in any danger, necessity, or tribulation ”—I would sooner be relieved by it, than by the love

of unbelief. It seems to me that there would be a finer flavour in the relief; that the same cup of cold water held to my lips by it, would taste more divinely, and do me more good.

One hand may give me just as much as another, and yet somehow, the other gives me more. Nay, one hand shall be more welcome, and more consoling to me in sore need, though it be *quite empty*, than another, though it be *ever so full*. A mother's hand, now, in sickness, for smoothing the pillow, and cooling the head, and raising you; is it not *nicer* than the nurse's, however sagacious, and attentive, and skilful, and kind, hers may be? Is there not something different in its touch, even although the nurse's might be equally soft and gentle; something more secretly effectual, more subtly healing? And why? Because it is the hand of one who sees in you, not a mere stranger whom it is her duty to wait upon; nor a mere suffering fellow-creature, in pity for whom she has volunteered her services; but *the child, the son*.

And surely, in the hand of those to whom man is the ranked and related creature that the Gospel declares him; the needy and miserable shall find another and a diviner touch,—a touch, tempered, purified, refined by the reverence and enthusiasm of the faith that lies behind,—a touch, such as cannot be felt in the hand of him to whom we are mere pitiable children of clay.

"The end of the commandment is charity," but charity, remember, "out of a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned."









